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ABSTRACT

This descriptive state-of-the-art report presents a survey of recent distance learning developments in Britain, mainly by local colleges in the public education sector, and discusses the motivation and experience of adult learners. Distance learning in general is examined, and current models of provision and the audiences served by these programs are discussed for three broad categories: (1) Flexistudy, which combines college-based individual and group tutorials with individual correspondence course work; (2) directed private study, which combines work at home on correspondence course style materials with tutoring at local colleges; and (3) individualized home study, in which students arrange a program based on a mixture of currently available distance teaching materials, specially-prepared assignments, directed reading, and exercises. Distance learners and the experience of distance learning are discussed, and findings are reported from a survey of 69 students in two distance learning schemes. A final chapter considers the future development of distance learning for adults and summarizes main findings of preceding chapters. A 30-item reference list is provided, and appendices include a 7-item bibliography of open university research on distance learners, contributors to the report, and the Flexi-Study student profile questionnaire. (LMM)

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DISTANCE LEARNING AND ADULT STUDENTS

A review of recent developments in the public education sector

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The Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education is established by the Secretary of State for Education and Science with the following remit:

To advise generally on matters relevant to the provision of education for adults in England and Wales, and in particular:

(a) to promote co-operation between the various bodies in adult education and review current practice, organisation and priorities, with a view to the most effective deployment of available resources; and

(b) to promote the development of future policies and priorities with full regard to the concept of education as a process continuing throughout life.

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PREFACE

In publishing this report the Advisory Council seeks to draw attention to some of the current initiatives in Britain offering distance learning opportunities for adults. This is very largely a record of success, which the Council hopes will encourage more educational institutions to enter this field.

The report's description of these present opportunities concentrates on information about their value to adult students, the types of adults who choose to learn in this way and why they make this choice; also the skills needed, and the problems to be overcome by, the organisers and tutors working 'at a distance' from their students.

This has entailed a lot of work in getting together information and opinion not previously committed to paper. The Council's research officer, Stephen Brookfield, undertook the bulk of this work under the direction of the Council's Broadcasting and Open Learning Committee convened by Richard Freeman. The Council is grateful to Dr Brookfield and Mr Freeman and the members of his Committee, whose names are shown on page 71.

The extent of the enquiry is evident from the very large number of respondents, named in Appendix 2, who kindly contributed information. Without their assistance it would not have been possible to compile this report. The Council wishes to record its thanks for their invaluable help.

F J TAYLOR
Secretary to the Council

April 1983

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

If one measure of the health of continuing education provision is the vigour with which it responds to technological innovation, then continuing education is reasonably robust in Britain. After initial doubts, and some opposition, it has warmly welcomed the Open University and has co-operated vigorously in its development. On a smaller scale, there have been numerous experiments which have mixed elements of face-to-face tuition with educational broadcasting, correspondence education and programmed instruction, to create a network of locally administered distance learning schemes.

Between these levels of provision are the national bodies such as the National Extension College, the commercial correspondence colleges and the Trades Union Congress and individual trades unions' education departments, which offer courses and materials for students working at home. The BBC and the Independent broadcasting services, the latter now strengthened by the addition of Channel Four, provide learning opportunities on both a national and a regional scale. Regional consortia of colleges and departments, such as the Open College of the North-West, offer intensive courses for the home-based student. The traditional adult education bodies have seen less cause to join this movement, and anyway have not had the resources; but a number of national voluntary bodies, notably the National Federation of Women's Institutes, now provide correspondence courses for their members. In the industrial field there is the recently established Open Tech, which will also be operating mainly through existing institutions.

The Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, as part of its remit from the Secretary of State for Education and Science, is concerned to promote the development of policies and priorities in the provision of education as a lifelong opportunity for the whole community. Its major report, *Continuing education: from policies to practice,* stressed the importance of offering adults the alternative study methods that distance learning could bring and recommended substantial investment in this expanding provision.[1] To make that investment as effective as possible, it is important to understand the practical working of the many and varied existing schemes and to identify and describe the sectors of the adult population that have drawn most benefit from them. It is particularly important to examine the growing involvement of local colleges and centres in this area of learning provision.

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(1) References are listed on p.63.

That is the main purpose of this report. It is descriptive, rather than comparative or evaluative. It seeks to make more comprehensible the variety of distance learning opportunities that have developed during the last twenty years and the motivation and experience of adult learners who have benefited from these opportunities. It does not seek to compare the *learning effectiveness* of this form of learning with more traditional modes, for that would require a quite different investigation from the one that formed the basis of this report. Nor, for the same reason, does it seek to compare the *cost effectiveness* of distance learning with more traditional methods. Such studies have been reported elsewhere (most notably by the Open University). Neither comparison is a critical issue with adults making the choice between learning methods. In general they are more concerned with the availability and convenience of study. Third, this report does not attempt comparisons between practice in this country and elsewhere.

It is essentially a descriptive report of 'the state of the art' of distance learning in Britain. As such it allows some conclusions to be drawn; and a number of these are summarized in Chapter 5.

In particular it offers confirmatory evidence for the belief expressed in *Continuing education: from policies to practice* that simple administrative changes in the colleges and centres providing distance learning would significantly improve the effectiveness of these learning systems. The resources for a major extension of locally administered distance learning systems already exist in terms of competent staff and appropriate teaching materials. What is needed to release these resources is changes in staffing practices, a questioning of the allocation of resources and staff on the basis of student hours and course levels, and co-operation among local and national bodies. This will result in a marked improvement in the range and quality of distance learning provision: a change in attitude could have substantial consequence for both.

Finally, because the Open University has conducted its own research programme into its operation and clientele, it was felt there would be little point in replicating this work (see Appendix 1 for a bibliography of the Open University's published research findings). The report concentrates instead on the variety of schemes for other than degree level qualifications.

Chapter Two

THE MODE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

MEANING OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning is a phrase open to many interpretations. For the purposes of this enquiry, distance learning is regarded as broadly equivalent to non-contiguous learning, in which the teaching and the learning occur separately, in contrast to contiguous classroom learning where teaching and learning occur simultaneously. In contiguous learning communication between learner and teacher is personal and face-to-face. In non-contiguous learning there may be face-to-face communication for limited periods of time, but learners and teachers mostly communicate through written, mechanical, or electronic means.

In distance learning, as defined in this survey, students spend the greater part of their study time working on materials without the presence of either teachers or fellow students. These materials have most probably been prepared by teachers whom they do not know personally. Their study location is their own homes and any use of institutional resources (human or material) is supplementary to, rather than the central feature of, their studies.

However, this report shows that distance learning systems are many and various; consequently any specific definition is not likely to be universally valid. This enquiry, therefore, regards distance learning as a generic term covering a range of possible teaching-learning arrangements, within which can be included elements of: correspondence study, educational broadcasting, individualised instruction, face-to-face tuition, and self-help study groups. It might be more helpful simply to regard *distance* as a variable within teaching-learning systems, which show greater or lesser degrees of distance in teacher-student interaction, student-student dialogue, and the geographical separation of institution and learner.

There is a good deal of research showing that adults spend a lot of time in deliberate, purposeful learning quite independently of formal education institutions. Broadcasting, for example, can be used as an educative medium without any additional help from professional educators.

This self-planned, independent adult learning – what has been called the adult learning iceberg – is mostly outside the scope of the following enquiry, which concentrates on those distance learning systems containing teachers who instruct, advise and evaluate. These systems may allow for some collaborative planning between teachers and students (though this is comparatively rare), but the students are

not in a position to set their learning goals, choose their resources, and assess their own progress. However, some suggestions are made in chapter 5 about the ways in which the providers of distance learning might help informal, independent learners.

RATIONALES FOR AND AGAINST DISTANCE LEARNING

Considered discussion of distance learning is hampered by the vigour with which its proponents and opponents argue their cases. The proponents contend that distance learning has several unique and liberating advantages:

- It frees students from the academic year timetable and other schedules imposed by educational institutions. Students can integrate periods of distance learning into the idiosyncratic patterns of their occupational and domestic lives as and when appropriate. Consequently, it is suited to schemes of recurrent education.
- It frees students from the need to attend an educational institution on a daily, full-time or even part-time basis. It is therefore the only study alternative for many adults with domestic and occupational commitments.
- It frees students from the need to be within regular travelling distance of an educational institution. In distance learning systems geographical isolation is virtually no barrier to study.
- It frees students from any emotional and intellectual dependence on the teacher. Students are not intimidated by teacher presence, nor subject to pressure about acceptable responses. Students are therefore encouraged to develop a critical independence.
- It frees students from peer pressures. It is uniquely suited to those diffident adults who avoid instutitional enrolment for fear of revealing inadequacies to fellow students.
- Although initial production and writing costs may be high, the availability of the resultant teaching materials to a mass student audience makes it a cost effective mode of instruction.

Critics of distance learning contend that it is inferior to classroom learning and that it has inherent and insurmountable pedagogic and emotional limitations. They argue that:

- Distance learners miss the verbal and non-verbal cues transmitted by teachers and which are essential to accurate assimilation and understanding of new knowledge and skills.
- Distance learners miss the stimulus and the periodic reinforcement of enthusiasm derived from direct contact with teachers and other students.
- The rigid, prescriptive and sequenced nature of distance teaching materials does not allow learners to develop any critical independence.

- Distance learners are disadvantaged because they have no access to the resources and facilities open to classroom based students – libraries, laboratories and quiet work rooms.

The review of providers' and students' opinions about distance learning, in chapter 4, provides a more considered estimate of the advantages claimed for, and of the criticisms most frequently levelled against distance learning.

STATUS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Until recently, the image of distance learning held by educationists and the general public has hardly been flattering in this country as in many others: probably because distance learning has come to be associated with some of the worst aspects of the less reputable commercial correspondence courses.

The *Russell Report* commented that correspondence education had only made a limited contribution to the education of adults although it predicted that: *"....the example of the Open University is likely to bring into prominence the need for similar forms of provision at other levels and in non-academic fields which would benefit from being serviced by modest analogues of the Open University".*[2] These would be multi-media systems combining teaching at a distance with face-to-face tuition. The following chapters testify to the prescience of the Russell Committee. With the quantitative increase in the number of local distance learning initiatives has begun a qualitative change in attitudes towards such learning.

It is not hard to see why distance learning is regarded as a second best, to be considered only when access to residential full-time courses is denied. Since the early days of the Workers' Educational Association and the University extra-mural movement, the discussion group has been regarded as the teaching-learning medium most appropriate to adult education: the democratic ethos of these movements has regarded the participatory exchange of experience as socially desirable and educationally beneficial. Numerous cognitive and affective benefits are claimed for classroom discussion, which has also figured largely in the training of adult educators.

By contrast, distance learning is often judged to be a lonely and difficult way of learning, with inadequate teacher-student contact, a rigid adherence to predetermined lesson units, and lacking in the beneficial student interaction found in the classroom.

METHODS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

A variety of instructional techniques and settings are available to teachers and students in distance learning systems. The most common are: students working at home on centrally produced corres-

pondence courses; and students combining correspondence course work with periods of face-to-face tuition. It is the second of these two distance learning modes with which most of this report is concerned. But before examining the combinations of correspondence course work and face-to-face tuition in detail, we consider the educative potential of other modes of learning at a distance: broadcasting, study discussion groups, and informal independent learning.

Broadcasting

As the *Russell Report* pointed out *"Broadcasting is already a major component in the total provision of adult education in this country, valuable in several ways"*.[3] Its greatest virtue is accessibility, which the *Russell Report* held to be one of the chief criteria by which a well developed system of adult education can be judged. This uniquely favourable (in educational access terms) aspect of broadcasting was one of the reasons why the Russell Committee called for the creation of lower level analogues of the Open University, combining broadcasting with face-to-face tuition.

The Advisory Council's report on the development of continuing education[4] identified five categories of educational provision in broadcasting:

- Generally educative documentary and drama programmes.
- Educative programmes broadcast in conjunction with specially produced books, which allow viewers to derive greater benefit from a series. An example would be the television series on architecture *Six English towns*.
- Programmes which stimulate participation in local education. A prime example would be the *On The Move* series aimed at encouraging adult non-readers to register in local adult literacy schemes.
- Programmes to be used by teachers in face-to-face tuition. Most of schools broadcasting falls within this category. Examples from the world of adult education would be the *Living decisions* and *What rights have you got?* series, although (as with many programmes in this category) some students were willing and able to follow the series without ever contacting a college or centre.
- Programmes which are one element in a complete learning package, for example, foreign language courses which combine broadcasts, audio-cassettes or records, and specially produced textbooks.

Study Discussion Groups

One combination of broadcasting and face-to-face tuition with a long and respectable tradition in adult education is the study discussion group linked to a particular broadcast or series. This initiative falls somewhere between the third and fourth category listed above. Since these groups generally exist in their own right and not to serve as

recruiting devices for class-based provision, they do not qualify as an example of the third category, but neither can they be included in the fourth category because the groups are mostly leaderless, or rotate their chairmanship rather than being under the constant and direct control of a recognised professional teacher. Both the National Extension College and the Council for Educational Technology have begun to take an interest in the phenomenon of self-help learning groups. In the first issue of the NEC *Study Circle Newsletter* (August 1982) the self-help learning groups highlighted included the British Rail commuter study groups, the Attleborough Learning Exchange in Norfolk, and a self-help group in computer programming.

The best known examples of these groups are in Sweden and North America, associated with radio listening groups formed among scattered rural populations, but the Open University's attempt to encourage local self-help study groups is in this tradition. The earliest examples of self-help study discussion groups occurred in Britain in 1927, when the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education devised a five year plan (1928–1933) to encourage the development of local wireless listening groups in conjunction with radio series such as *Modern Britain in the making, Mind and body* and *The changing world.* Pamphlets on *Hints to study* and *Wireless discussion groups* were issued and a report on wireless listening groups was produced in 1933 by the Inspectorate of the Board of Adult Education.

A recent initiative in encouraging local viewing and listening groups is the Age Concern Inner London Education Authority distance learning pilot scheme for viewing and listening groups planned to start in late 1982. Through this scheme an ILEA advisor is working with Age Concern to provide training for volunteers, clubleaders, and anyone else wanting to foster the development of such groups in clubs for the elderly, residential homes, or living rooms. The proposed viewing and listening network would be assisted by the ILEA mediator and advised by the BBC Education Department as to forthcoming programmes which might form the focus for group discussions. Such groups would not be registered adult education classes but self-contained discussion groups for the elderly, linked to educative programmes on the BBC network.

Broadcasting Support Services

The audience for broadly educative television and radio programmes is potentially enormous, outnumbering several times those who regularly watch educational broadcasts. However, while support is offered to groups viewing broadcasts (whether as formal classes or informal study groups), individual viewers have been left more or less to their own devices. More recently the Broadcasting Support Services Unit has helped individual viewers to follow-up opportunities seen or

heard on the broadcasting networks. The Unit grew out of the Adult Literacy Support Services Fund established to support the adult literacy project beginning with the *On the move* series.

Broadcasting Support Services is open for use by any part of the public or independent broadcasting network. Although most experienced in supporting networked television programmes, the Unit also works with local and national radio stations. Its chief function is to serve as an information referral service: 80,000 poor readers have been put in touch with local literacy tutors by the telephone referral service and 30,000 potential volunteer tutors have been referred to local schemes. The multi-lingual telephone and referral service attached initially to the BBC *Speak for yourself* series is now permanently established with a panel of 60 linguists on a part-time basis offering information on health, consumer advice, housing, and welfare concerns. In 1981 the Unit established *Line 81* as an information service for disabled adults. It also publishes basic education resource materials and general information leaflets to extend the subject content of television and radio broadcasts.

Informal Independent Learning

The learning occurring in formal adult education classes and courses is only one part of the whole range of adult learning. But it is easy for professional adult educators, concerned with maintaining a centre programme and attracting students into classes, to forget that such classes represent only the tip of the adult learning iceberg. There is plenty of research evidence from Britain, the United States and Canada, to show the range and depth of self-planned learning undertaken by adults outside formal adult education settings. Such learning can reach high levels of sophistication and expertise as well as being concerned with lower level tasks.

Researchers in this field generally assert that informal independent learning is not equivalent to isolated learning. Learners associate with fellow learners and enthusiasts and form themselves into a variety of learning groups, some of which take the form of hobbyists' and enthusiasts' societies. They use libraries and broadcasting as resources and aids to learning, but it is noticeable that fellow learners, intimates, and work colleagues are consistently cited as being the most important resources for independent learners. Another feature of this research into independent adult learning is the frequency with which independent learners acknowledge that they would have liked more help with their learning than they were able to get. There is obviously scope here for those concerned with the preparation of distance teaching materials and the instruction of distance learners to make connections with informal independent learners: the last chapter of this report takes up this point.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

Estimates of the numbers engaged in distance learning in the United Kingdom are difficult to obtain. Students enrolled on correspondence courses, largely within the private commercial sector, are variously said to number between 500,000 and 650,000. Of this total some 50,000 to 60,000 are in the Open University. To the half million or so adults studying through correspondence courses must be added students enrolled in FlexiStudy schemes and in 'directed private study' schemes around the country. Finally, if we add in those adults who use radio and television programmes (both educative and educational) to structure their independent learning activities, then distance learning can be said to be ubiquitous.

Despite the large numbers of adults involved in distance learning systems, very little information is available about them; and what is known only adds to an already confusing picture, since the heterogeneity of distance learners is their chief characteristic. The UNESCO survey of open learning systems across the world[5] could only conclude that students in open learning vary considerably in age, are generally in full-time work, and that *"in ability, academic attainment and educational background they must be considered very heterogeneous"*. Vocational motives for learning seemed to predominate: to improve technical or professional skills for career advancement, to retrain to avoid redundancy, and to acquire new skills called for by technological advance.

The only major research project into the characteristics of distance learners in Britain (outside the Open University) was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science and conducted by the University of Manchester in the 1960s.[6] That enquiry surveyed students in eleven correspondence education institutions providing courses for degrees and other advanced qualifications. The main findings of this 'enrolment' survey of 13,304 students were:

- *Geographical location*
  Nearly half of the students lived in South East England and 37 per cent within the Greater London Council and outer metropolitan areas. A further 17 to 20 per cent lived in the urban conurbations of the North West, Yorkshire, and Humberside. Hence, 50 per cent of students lived in major conurbations and 10 per cent in minor conurbations, all of which were well served by further education facilities and resources. The report commented *"so much for the idea that correspondence study is an activity mainly for those living in remote areas."*
- *Student profiles*
  'Professionals': students for three professional qualifications were surveyed. The Institute of Bankers (AIB) students were young (mostly 17 to 23), with a moderately good GCE O-level record, male

and unmarried. They attached great importance to the fact that correspondence study allowed them to work by themselves, at their own pace, and in their own time. Students enrolled on Institute of Cost and Works Accountants (ACWA) and Corporation of Secretaries (ACCS) courses were in their mid-20s, mostly male, married and with slightly poor GCE O-level records. They had also had more experience of part-time and correspondence study.

Degree students: these were students on BSc(Econ) courses and were, not surprisingly, older and employed in professional white collar occupations such as the civil service, local government, commerce, education and librarianship. They were already highly qualified and the lack of suitable classes was a major reason for choosing correspondence study for 38 per cent of them.

GCE A-level students: the largest group of students surveyed (7,135) comprised almost equally of men and women. A higher proportion of men than women was evident in students aged under 35, the reverse being true of students over that age. 15 per cent of these were students, 12 per cent housewives, and most of the remainder were employed in white collar occupations – education, government service, libraries, manufacturing industries, medical and welfare services and commerce. Seventy per cent intended to study by correspondence only, largely because of its convenience, although a quarter of these reported a lack of suitable courses in their areas.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this national study of correspondence learners was their reasons for choosing what might be regarded as a less than satisfactory, second best alternative way of learning. The authors of the survey noted that: *"The students' decision to study by correspondence was not forced on them by lack of available oral classes...(it) appears to be the outcome of positive expectations about features of the correspondence method. Other considerations such as the occupational and domestic circumstances of the student were secondary to this."*

In 1975 the National Extension College (NEC) decided to survey its student clientele to demonstrate that the picture of the typical distance learner as *"handicapped, living in a remote rural area and doing a shift-work job"* was inaccurate. Six-hundred of its 6,000 students were sent a postal questionnaire; 207 were returned. Despite the limited response, the NEC believed that the data provided a reasonably accurate picture of its clientele and published its findings in a report entitled *The invisible students.*

The student profile revealed more women (56 per cent) than men (44 per cent). The modal age band was between 25 and 34 and three-quarters were between 20 and 44 years of age. Fifty-nine per cent of the women students were concentrated in two occupational categories – housewives and clerical/office staff. The male students were spread

much more evenly over a range of occupational categories. Nearly one-third of the male students had no previous educational qualifications at all, against only 14 per cent of the women; 44 per cent of the women possessed GCE O-levels as against 21 per cent of the men.

The most frequently cited reason for studying (mentioned by 46 per cent of all students) was to prepare for the Open University. Other important reasons were the intrinsic interest of the course (mentioned by 24 per cent) and its relevance to preparing for a future career (21 per cent). Of particular interest was the fact that 83 per cent of the students had suitable courses at adult and further education institutions available in their locality, but chose instead to study by correspondence: the single largest response being simply that they preferred correspondence study because of its convenience and flexibility.

The Open University has conducted a considerable programme of research into its operation and clientele (see Appendix 1 for a brief bibliography of some of this work) and its findings include:

- Teachers constituted the single largest occupational group of applicants, approximately one-quarter in 1974 and one-fifth in 1978. Housewives were the second largest group applying (14.4 per cent in 1978) and other well represented groups were the professions and the arts, clerical and office staff, and technical personnel. Applicants from working-class occupations were generally under 10 per cent. The proportion of women applicants has gradually increased to 44.3 per cent of all applicants in 1978.
- Over half of the new students have the qualifications necessary for admission to a full-time degree course, but many of these were unqualified when leaving school; thus a great number of the teachers using the Open University to obtain graduate status gained admission to their initial teacher training course on the basis of GCE O-levels.
- Approximately three-quarters of first intake students proceeded to final registration after their three month period of initial registration. The graduation rate for students is hard to estimate as the credit system allows students to take as many years as they wish to obtain a degree. However, in 1978 it was estimated that the final graduation rate for the first intake of students would be approximately 55 per cent.
- In a major study of over 2,500 NEC students on Open University preparatory courses the most commonly cited reason for choosing to study by correspondence was *"prefer to work in own time – at own pace – in own home"*.

A review of student demand and progress during the first eight years at the Open University concluded that: *"The basic beliefs held by the Open University's founders have proved to be true. There was a great*

demand for degree-level studies among working adults and this demand has continued as evidenced by the application figures over the years. The information on student performance has also demonstrated that great numbers of people can study successfully at a distance. Every year three out of four admitted students proceed to final registration and over eight out of ten who do so gain some course credit. Approximately one half of all finally registered students will eventually graduate".[7]

The National Extension College recently conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of study counselling on correspondence students' progress.[8] Fifty-three students in the Leeds area, enrolled on a variety of NEC correspondence courses, were informed that a local study counsellor had been appointed to advise on study difficulties and course availability and to generate self-help learning groups amongst NEC correspondence students. These students formed the experimental group; the two contol groups comprised 60 students in Manchester and 227 students across the country who enrolled (like the Leeds students) during the academic year 1977–78. The modal age range of these 340 students was 25–34 and three-quarters of all the students were aged between 20 and 44. Five occupational categories were pre-eminent (in ranked order of importance): housewives, professions and the arts (including nurses), not working (including retired, unemployed and students), clerical and office staff, and those in technical occupations. Those without any previous educational qualifications were 18.9 per cent of the Leeds students, 36.8 per cent of the Manchester students, and 22.8 per cent of the national control group.

Students' reasons for study were discussed in telephone and personal interviews. Two categories emerged as particularly important: the interest and personal challenge of study; and the desire to gain qualifications. There were four reasons given for choosing to study through correspondence rather than day or evening classes: its suitability for domestic and work routines; the lack of any suitable available class in the locality; encouragement from work; and preference for this mode of study.

Chapter Three

CURRENT PROVISION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with current models of provision in a distance learning mode and the audiences served by these programmes. The distance learning scene is characterised by constant change and innovation: as this report was being prepared there were significant developments in distance learning courses approved by the Business and Technician Education Councils as well as the evolution of the idea of an Open Tech. To introduce some order in the description in this chapter of distance learning schemes, they are grouped in three broad categories. All three categories share the characteristic of being college based: adults enrol as students in a college which may primarily serve either a local area or, like the Open University or the NEC, the whole country. These schemes are based on existing institutions and have consequently not required the creation of new providing agencies: the colleges involved were already engaged in face-to-face teaching and simply adapted their provision to include distance learners.

FlexiStudy. These schemes combine college-based individual and group face-to-face tutorials with individual correspondence course work in students' homes. Students in a FlexiStudy course purchase a complete correspondence course from the local college. This set of materials serves as the main instructional package, but assignments completed during the course are marked by a staff member at the local college and the students can meet that staff member, and fellow FlexiStudy students, for individual and group tutorials.

Directed Private Study. These schemes combine work at home on correspondence course style materials with face-to-face tuition at local colleges. This model differs from that of FlexiStudy in two ways: in most DPS schemes the instructional materials are prepared by staff in the college who have specific responsibility for writing distance learning packages; the face-to-face tuition is mostly provided through weekend courses and other short residential workshops, rather than as fortnightly tutorials as in FlexiStudy schemes.

Individualised Home Study. In these schemes adults enrol as students at a particular college, but, unlike FlexiStudy and DPS students, they do not generally enrol in prepared courses. Instead, they arrange a programme of work with staff at the college based on a mixture of currently available distance teaching materials, specially prepared assignments, directed reading, and individually arranged

exercises. The range of courses and techniques, and the frequency and variety of face-to-face tuition, is therefore likely to be considerably wider than in FlexiStudy or DPS systems.

One fact which emerges clearly from the survey in the following pages is that the schemes documented have developed within existing institutions, largely because the staff in the colleges concerned were able and willing to initiate changes in administrative practices. There was no need to invest large sums of new money to create these distance learning schemes, since human and material resources and expertise were already available. What freed these resources to set up distance learning schemes was the introduction of administrative changes in, for example, enrolment procedures and the costing of staff time. The importance of central directives to encourage administrative flexibility is emphasised in the last chapter of this report.

One exception to the college-based model of provision is the local education authority scheme currently being established in Dyfed and involving a range of agencies – colleges, libraries, correspondence colleges, industrial training bodies – supported by a co-ordinating unit. This central development unit, or clearinghouse, will: disseminate information about open learning opportunities in Dyfed, match tutors, students and counsellors, train staff, prepare teaching materials, engage in curriculum development, and help colleges in local administration. The unit's functions should be supportive and enabling rather than controlling. It is to be sited in the further education department in the LEA offices.

FLEXISTUDY

Saturday conferences

FlexiStudy, an NEC trade mark shared with local education authority colleges through a licensing system, describes a specific form of localised distance learning. The model, which has subsequently been followed by over a hundred colleges in establishing FlexiStudy systems, was initially provided by Barnet College. The origins can be traced to 1971 when Barnet College offered a series of Saturday conferences for students enrolled in NEC correspondence courses. Students travelled to Barnet on four Saturdays each year to take part in tutorials and seminars. These conferences allowed shift workers, young mothers, and others unable to manage regular evening attendances, to meet fellow-students. The subjects offered varied from year to year, but normally included English (GCE O-level to degree work), history, biology, sociology, psychology, and pre-Open University courses in literature and science.

The benefits derived from Saturday conferences are both affective and cognitive. For adults studying correspondence lesson units on their own, it is important to reinforce interest and motivation occasionally and to reassure those who think they are contending with difficulties which others do not encounter. Because these students are not used to tutorial work, because they do not know each other (or the tutor), and because they are at different stages in the course, tutors at Saturday conferences face considerable pedagogic challenges. As one tutor put it: *"the tutor has to adopt a flexible approach and must seek to accommodate the needs of all the students but avoid the danger of becoming too vague and general".*[9]

Linked Courses

NEC/college linked courses are not true examples of distance learning since they contain classroom teaching. However, they are an example of the local adaption of centrally prepared distance learning materials. In linked courses the students enrol for a series of part-time day or evening classes at which they are supplied with NEC correspondence texts. Students pay the standard enrolment fee for the course plus the cost of the NEC texts. The classroom teacher also acts as the correspondence tutor and the students complete correspondence assignments at their own pace. Classroom instruction covers the main areas in the correspondence units, but teachers are free to explore other areas if they so wish. Two advantages are claimed for linked courses; that students' learning is fostered by two complementary methods, and that missing a class does not mean a falling behind in the course.

General Principles

FlexiStudy is aimed at three types of students:

- Those whose domestic and occupational commitments prevent them from regularly attending part-time day or evening classes.
- Those enrolled in a course in which there are too few students to justify class instruction.
- Those wanting to study to a timetable which does not coincide with the conventional academic year.

The teaching-learning arrangements fall somewhere between the Saturday conference and the linked course. Students who wish to study a course through FlexiStudy at a local college are provided with an NEC course text and assignments, and a member of the college's lecturing staff as a tutor. This tutor functions as assignment marker, as personal tutor, and as seminar leader. Students work through the correspondence text and send their completed assignments to their local FlexiStudy tutor. They are also usually invited to meet their tutor and sometimes fellow-students for occasional tutorials. Depending on

the size and facilities of the college these meetings can be individually arranged or at fixed times. FlexiStudy students are regarded as students of the college, with access to its equipment and facilities such as libraries and laboratories. They are also able to sit for public examinations at the college. The FlexiStudy curriculum is determined by the range of NEC courses available and the availability of local correspondence tutors.

A Case Study: Barnet College

Both Saturday conferences and linked courses have been part of the provision at Barnet College since 1971. In 1977 the College Vice-Principal reported that: *"For the past six years we have been investigating some of the possibilities and problems of distance learning. Our assumptions are that less direct teaching might be replaced by more directed learning; that in thus shifting the emphasis we might be able to help more people who want to learn; and that we might reach more people, including those who, for a variety of reasons, are unable or unwilling to join a traditional further education class. We have spent the time coming to terms with the problems of the distance learner; firstly by inviting correspondence students to join us for general and intensive tutorial sessions and secondly by offering to the traditional range of second chance learners who attend part-time classes the possibility of study linked to correspondence course material."*[10]

The success of these two initiatives led Barnet to propose an extension of correspondence-based study to allow correspondence students regular access to College resources and facilities, particularly that of staff expertise. The result was FlexiStudy, launched in September 1977 with twenty-eight NEC courses on offer. In just over twelve months 350 students enrolled in these FlexiStudy courses, which obliged the College virtually to stop all publicity about the scheme. Only 6 per cent of these students came from outside the College's usual catchment area, the majority living in North London or Hertfordshire.

Students wanting to study through FlexiStudy are first interviewed by a FlexiStudy adviser when the scheme is described in detail and the would-be students discuss the most appropriate course for their needs. On registering the students are assigned a tutor and a schedule of mutually convenient meetings is arranged. Small group tutorials are generally held every four or five weeks with an increased frequency preceding examinations. The function of these tutorials is largely reactive, with tutors discussing difficulties which have arisen in already completed assignments.

The fee charged to Barnet FlexiStudy students is made up of four components: assignments, tutorials, NEC materials, and administra-

tion charges. The tutor is paid for each student assignment marked and for each group of five individual tutorials given (equivalent to one group tutorial for five students). Fee levels are fixed so that the scheme is self-financing.

Analysis of Provision

There can be no definitive description of FlexiStudy provision because its availability in different colleges varies according to the personnel involved, the resources allocated, and the students enrolled. The following analysis is based on the 1981 *FlexiStudy bulletin* which contains information from the 100 colleges then taking part in the scheme.

Geographical location

Distance learning is often advocated as being particularly suited to rural areas, but in fact the greatest concentration of centres is in the most heavily populated areas, such as South East England, the Home Counties, London and the East and West Midlands. However, South West England does show a strong FlexiStudy representation.

Teaching-learning arrangements

- Continuous enrolment is available to students at 80 colleges.
- Tutorial arrangements vary widely from fixed times to individually arranged times and telephone tutorials: fixed time tutorials are available at 25 centres; tutorials at times agreed with students are available at 83 centres (18 of these also offered fixed time tutorials); telephone tutorials are available at 53 centres; 13 centres offer all three arrangements and 49 offer a combination of individually arranged and telephone tutorials.
- Specialist resources, for example the availability of science and language laboratory facilities to FlexiStudy students, obviously affect the range of courses which can be offered. Science laboratory facilities are available at 43 centres and language laboratory facilities also at 43.
- Examination centres are particularly important since most FlexiStudy courses are at GCE-O and A-level. For practical and emotional reasons students prefer to sit their end of course examinations at the centre where they have pursued their studies. This facility is available at 85 centres.
- Subject availability is heavily credit-oriented since the majority of students are enrolled in GCE courses. However, this does not imply a wholly vocational motivation because several popular subject interests (for example, sociology, English, history) can only be studied through FlexiStudy as GCE courses. Because local centres depend on NEC course packages for their instructional materials, students with a general interest are enrolled in GCE courses whether or not

they intend to enter the examination. Even examination entrance cannot be taken as an indication of vocational motivation since students may view this solely as a test of achievement at the end of their studies and not as a route to further career development. Subject availability through Flexistudy is listed below with the number of colleges (in brackets) at which the courses are offered:

Introductory

Study Skills (48)
Maths Introductory (46)
English Introductory (42)
Essay Writing (41)
Computer Programming (Introductory) (36)
Computing (introductory) (30)
German Introductory (29)
Social Science: OU Preparatory (18)
Latin Introductory (17)
Arts OU Preparatory (16)
Science OU Preparatory (14)
Ecology Introductory (10)
Statistics Introductory (8)
Russian Introductory (7)
Maths OU Preparatory (6)

O level

English Language (74)
Sociology (65)
Maths (Traditional) (56)
Human Biology (53)
History (52)
English Literature (47)
French (39)
Biology (35)
Maths (Modern) (34)
Geography (29)
German (29)
Economics (26)
Economic & Social History (25)
Physics (25)
Spanish (22)
World Powers History (18)
Accounts (17)
Chemistry (17)
German Revision (13)
British Constitution (13)
French Revision (13)
Statistics (12)
Arithmetic (11)
Law (9)
Psychology (9)
Environmental Studies (7)
Russian (6)
Family and Community Studies (6)
General Studies (5)
Anatomy (4)
Pottery (2)
Archaeology (1)

A level

English (64)
Sociology (55)
History (39)
Economics (35)
Maths (30)
Pure Maths (24)
German (24)
Geography (23)
Economic & Social History (21)
Physics (18)
Biology (17)
French (17)
Chemistry (16)
Politics & Government (15)
Computer Science (12)
Human Biology (11)

Art History (8)
Law (8)
Accounts (5)
General Studies (5)
Italian (5)
Pottery (2)
Anatomy (1)
Dressmaking (1)

General interest
French (27)
Child Development (8)
Retirement (6)
Religions of Mankind (6)
Music (5)
American Studies (3)
Disabled Living (2)
Playgroups (1)

Technician Education Council Courses
Construction Technical (3)
Maths (3)
Measurement (3)
Physical Science (3)
Site Surveying (2)

Professional courses
Banking (2)
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (1)
Local Administration (1)

DIRECTED PRIVATE STUDY: PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND TARGET GROUPS

Unlike FlexiStudy arrangements, which have evolved in the last few years, directed private study (DPS) schemes have been in existence for up to twenty years. In DPS schemes the course materials are written by the staff who also act as teachers and evaluators of student progress. Instead of using centrally produced, standardised, instructional packages, DPS staff devise their own lesson units. Theoretically, therefore, such teaching materials should be suited to local circumstances and the scope for misinterpretation and ambiguity should be considerably reduced. This contrasts with National Extension College and Open University staff who interpret and explain ready-made and centrally produced correspondence units. DPS schemes can function, however, without locally produced materials. The main characteristic of these schemes is that they provide face-to-face tuition in periods of block attendance.

The schemes described in this section demonstrate the range and variety of training programmes for adults using distance education as the medium of instruction. These programmes largely rely on locally produced instructional materials and the students deal with specified tutors at their local college. This section does not offer a comprehensive index of distance learning provision through DPS, not least because training programmes for the 16 to 19 age group are not

included. The section identifies a number of target groups for professional training and the schemes discussed are categorised according to the student group they serve, rather than their operational features.

The general principle governing the selection of schemes for inclusion in the following survey is that they should have been in existence long enough to have been reasonably well documented. A few schemes, which have been in existence for only a short time, are included because they represent new developments in target audiences or methods.

A disproportionate number of Scottish colleges are included, because, although the conditions of a scattered rural population in a very large geographical area do not obtain in many parts of England and Wales, some Scottish provision is relevent to activities south of the border. As we have already seen, distance learning is suitable for urban areas and large numbers of adults choose to study in this manner rather than enrolling in locally available classes. Hence, a viable model of distance learning evolved in a rural area can be easily replicated in an urban context. It is also evident that many of the students enrolled in Scottish distance learning schemes are resident in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or Scottish towns. The relatively high incidence of initiatives in Scotland is partly due to the existence of a Scottish Central Co-ordinating Committee in Directed Private Study.

Accountancy

Studying for accountancy qualifications has traditionally been an important part of the work of commercial correspondence colleges. Pass rates in such courses tend to be low and wastage rates high. Some local education authority colleges now offer accountancy courses combining correspondence and classroom tuition. In 1965 the South West London College established an accountancy course in which the students attend the college for four weeks at the beginning of the course and for five weeks immediately prior to the examination. Tuition during the intervening period is through a correspondence course written by college staff, for which the students complete two written exercises each week. Tutors are on duty at the college in the evenings so that registered students can discuss their studies and obtain advice on particular difficulties. The College Principal has written that *"The effectiveness of this method of tuition as opposed to the correspondence course per se is further improved because for much of the time the student is in contact with the tutor responsible for large sections of the work. The tutor may have written the course, given oral tuition to the student, and also marked his scripts"*.[11] The South West London College is unusual in local education authority distance learning provision in that it has a special DPS Unit with six full-time staff assisted by other full and part-time staff in the college.

The longest established initiative in the local education authority use of distance education methods is the Flexastudy, not FlexiStudy, scheme at Redditch College. Since 1956 the College has experimented with various forms of tutorial support for correspondence students and the Department of Management and Professional Studies now supervises students for professional qualifications in accountancy, administration, marketing, banking, and purchasing and supply. College attendance is arranged to suit individual students who, on arrival, are assigned desks and subject tutors for the duration of their stay. The College provides a resources bank of learning materials and students can discuss their work with fellow-learners and College staff. Occasional group seminars are also arranged. For some students the fact that all their work is done at the College (through individualised learning packages and tutorial support) means that Flexastudy is not so much distance learning as self-paced learning-by-appointment.

There are two interesting combinations of local education authority and commercial correspondence college provision at Norwich City College and Bristol Polytechnic. At Norwich, students studying for membership of the Institute of Chartered Accountants follow the course provided by Foulkes Lynch, a commercial correspondence college. There is a one-day induction session to introduce students to the materials and then four blocks of full-time study attendance at the College are interspersed with home-based correspondence study. At Bristol Polytechnic another commercial college, the Rapid Results College, provides the home study instructional materials for block release students. At the time of writing the Pontypridd Technical College in Mid-Glamorgan is preparing a FlexiStudy course in professional accountancy.

Business Studies

In 1973 a co-ordinating committee representing the Highlands and Islands Education Authorities, the Scottish Business Education Council, the Highlands and Islands Development Board, the Scottish Education Department and other interested bodies, established a pilot DPS scheme for handicapped students and persons living in isolated rural areas. The qualifications to be offered were the Scottish National Certificate and the Scottish Higher National Certificate in Business Studies; the participating colleges were Aberdeen College of Commerce, Moray College of Further Education, Thurso Technical College and Inverness Technical College. The scheme was specifically intended for adult students who were seen to be faced with exceptionally difficult barriers to learning.

The resultant provision was known as Directed Private Study in the Highlands and Islands. The students worked primarily on correspondence units in their own homes, but mandatory attendance was

required at three blocks of three-day face-to-face tutorials in order for the students to be eligible for entry to the SCOTBEC examinations. The staff preparing correspondence instruction materials and correcting assignments were given an allowance of time against normal teaching duties. The success of this scheme has led to its expansion and, in a related development, the Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET) has appointed an Open Learning Systems Project Officer to develop and promote open and distance learning provision.

The emphasis on this scheme's suitability chiefly for *adult* students has remained. In a recent policy statement the Scottish Co-ordinating Committee for Distance Learning Schemes in Vocational Further Education declared that the scheme was intended for students of at least 20 years of age, and only as supplementary to existing further education day-release for 16 to 18 year olds. Typical recruits are seen by the committee to be adults in isolated areas, the physically handicapped, shift workers, and those with heavy domestic or personal commitments. The time allocated for tutors in preparing and servicing courses is laid down and the Committee advises a national agreement on these duties to be incorporated into the conditions of service for further education lecturers.

Dock Employees

In 1970 the National Ports Council launched a scheme, in conjunction with the South West London College, to offer port employees training through correspondence study supplemented by occasional local college attendance. The course, designed by a college-industry working party, was intended to revise basic literacy and numeracy skills, to develop students' general knowledge and understanding of the industry, and to provide a basis for entry to professional bodies and management and supervisory training. The DPS course was available to employees in ports across Britain and over 600 students enrolled in the first month. Attempts to establish tutorial support groups in London, Glasgow and Hull were unsuccessful, but Liverpool maintained a thriving series of evening tutorials.

Legal Studies

In 1979 the Department of Law at Napier College, Edinburgh, was approached by two professional legal organisations, both of which believed a new kind of teaching service was required within the legal studies field. The first, the Law Society of Scotland, felt that there was a substantial number of adult students wanting to take Law Society examinations, but for whom attendance at a two or three year full-time course of intensive study was impossible. The geographical spread of these students and their small number (an average annual intake is less than 20) made a day-release or evening course impracticable.

To provide for these students the staff of the College's Law Department prepared a series of distance learning packages which required students to work at set exercises using standard reference texts as their source materials. Six members of staff were involved in the course and all were allowed remission of tutorial time for preparation and marking duties. Each student registered was regarded as equivalent to two-sevenths of a full-time student, with a staff-student ratio of 1 to 14 in operation.

The second body to approach Napier College was the Institute of Professional Investigators, which felt that standards in its profession could be raised through a training programme to be followed by all investigators. The Law Department staff, in conjunction with the governing body of the Institute, devised a course of study packages combining factual information, self-testing units and essay questions. The staff were involved in curriculum creation and development since, unlike the Law Society course there was no pre-ordained syllabus. The same two-sevenths equivalent has been taken as the norm for each student registered, but the low numbers of students involved has resulted in a staff-student ratio of around 1 to 7.

The Head of the Law Department is convinced that Napier's experience shows that legal studies can be taught through distance learning techniques. He notes, however, that *"Such projects can only be successfully developed if the institution developing them has ample resources, and there can hardly be an institution anywhere in Great Britain that is in this position at the time of writing . . . it may simply be the case that the current economic climate is not conducive to this type of operation".*[12]

Librarians

Napier College has also been responsible for an initiative to prepare adults for the Library Association's professional examinations. In 1973 a series of readings and written assignments was developed by staff in the Department of Library and Information Resources to be studied through distance learning. The students are adults with considerable experience in library work, often holding posts of responsibility, but with no professional qualifications, for whom a period of full-time professional training is not appropriate.

These students spend 10 to 15 hours each week reading relevant texts supplemented by weekly or fortnightly tutorials at which staff give guidance on examination preparation and deal with study difficulties. A tutorial is said to be a *"trouble-shooting exchange of experience seminar"*. Students also make use of telephone consultations. Each of the three staff chiefly involved in the course devotes approximately eight hours a week to this work.

The main student activity is reading the books and journals indicated in the study guides. A variety of programme texts, microforms, and tape slide presentations are available, but students have shown a marked preference for traditional printed material and seem unready to use the hardware available. Counselling of students is of prime importance and begins before students enrol on the course, when staff ensure that they understand the work pattern and workload. Counselling, which continues until the final examination, covers such things as book selection, essay assessment, subject and paper selection, and priority allocation methods. The Napier programme is now in its final phase as the Library Association is withdrawing its external examinations.

Marine Engineers and Merchant Seamen

The Seafarers Education Service and the College of the Sea, established by Albert Mansbridge in 1919, help merchant seamen pursue their general education while at sea. The main function of the Seafarers Education Service is to provide small library collections on British merchant ships. The College of the Sea chiefly offers general interest correspondence courses, with languages being the most popular subject area.

Marine engineers and navigators require professional certificates and endorsements issued by the Department of Trade as evidence of competence, and study for these has often of necessity to be on board ship. A number of local education authority colleges (Hull College of Higher Education, Hackney College, Liverpool Polytechnic, Southampton College of Technology, South Shields Marine and Technical College, South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, and Leith Nautical College) offer correspondence courses (or parts of courses) leading to Department of Trade professional qualifications. Adult students on these schemes are outnumbered by those aged between 17 and 21, since it is industry policy to require an initial period of cadetship through guided study and college attendance. As and when the upgrading of skills or other training to meet technological innovation becomes regarded as necessary, distance learning would seem to be the best suited to this professional group.

Continuing Medical Education

A nationwide initiative in continuing professional education through distance learning for the 20,000 doctors in the United Kingdom has been pioneered in the Centre for Medical Education at the University of Dundee. The *Alment Report* on continuing medical education, published in 1976, recognised that the traditional in-service and refresher courses were poorly attended because of lack of time, distance from the training centre, lack of relevance to practice (being hospital-

orientated), and insufficient feed-back to participants. The Centre for Medical Education has attempted to use distance learning methods to allow doctors to assess their competence in managing practical problems, and to compare their decisions with those of their colleagues. Financial assistance has been provided for these initiatives by commercial pharmaceutical companies.

A series of six patient-management problems were devised by staff at the Centre, each focused on one patient and the decisions which had to be made about that patient's diagnosis, investigation and management. In each problem the physical setting, the resources available, and background information on the patient and his family, were given to allow informed decisions on the problem to be made. These problem-cases were then posted to the 20,000 general practitioners throughout Britain.

A unique feature was the element of immediate feed-back built into each patient-management package. The doctors, having recorded on paper their decisions on a problem, could then compare them with the decisions made by a specialist and by 100 senior general practitioners selected from a range of rural and urban practices. These decisions were printed in invisible ink using a latent image process: the doctors used a special pen to reveal these decisions once they had recorded their own course of action. Hence, the learners received immediate knowledge of how their decisions compared with those of selected experts and peers.

The doctors receiving these packages were invited to return to the Centre a card recording their decisions, and to obtain additional information from the authors of the package by letter or telephone. The Centre conducted an extensive evaluation of doctors' perceptions of learning at a distance. As the authors of a report on the Centre's work point out *"this approach to in-service training for doctors is applicable, we feel sure, to other in-service situations, for example the training of teachers, psychologists, and social workers"*.[13]

Military Personnel

Following discussions between the Ministry of Defence and the South West London College, a DPS course in business studies has been available since 1967 for military personnel about to leave the services. The course prepares students to sit the HNC examination in business studies and is open to suitably qualified applicants (with two GCE A-level passes or equivalent) who are within two years of leaving the services. The two-year course, divided into five stages, comprises a two-week classroom induction period, correspondence study, a two-week course introducing second year subjects, a second period of correspondence study, and a final four-week period of classroom tuition immediately prior to the examination.

The first ten years of the course saw a total enrolment of over 1,370 and an interim evaluation study in 1972 reported a pass rate of 90 per cent (compared with a national average of 70 per cent) and a drop-out rate of 28 per cent.[14] A report on the scheme published in 1980[15] noted that 1,550 serving officers and NCOs had enrolled in the scheme since its inception with a current level of 75 each year. This is one of the few schemes for which a calculation of comparative costs with other modes of study has been made.

In-Service Teacher Education

Since educational technology is often a feature of distance learning packages, it is appropriate that a number of in-service courses for teachers in educational technology should use distance education delivery systems. Other courses for teachers, ranging from maths to curriculum development, are also provided through distance learning.

Examples of distance learning courses in educational technology for teachers can be found at the University of Surrey, Dundee College of Education and Jordanhill College of Education in Glasgow. The University of Surrey Diploma in the Practice of Higher Education is, in fact, only available to overseas students, more particularly to academic staff at universities in South East Asia. The course derived from the *Information by post* scheme introduced at the University of Surrey, in which academic staff at that University complete a questionnaire indicating the kinds of topics they feel it would be useful to study for their own professional development. About two-fifths of the staff at the University have participated in the scheme and received learning packages on such topics as small group teaching, computer assisted learning, and lecturing.

In October 1980 the University's Institute for Educational Technology offered its Diploma in the Practice of Higher Education for the first time to seventeen students from universities in the Phillipines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. Students complete four core modules on aspects of teaching and learning, and at least one optional module, each module consisting of a printed study guide and a book of extracts of selected readings. Tutorial support is provided by post from the University.

The Advanced Diploma in Educational Technology at the Dundee College of Education provides an in-service professional development course for teachers throughout Britain. Although run from a Scottish college, the 1981 intake included ten staff members in English colleges and training institutions (one third of course members) and six in overseas institutions (Swaziland, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa). Of the 31 students enrolled on the 1981 course less than half (12) were working in Scotland. The course was developed from an existing one-year full-time course which used a good deal of individualised

instruction. The students, who register for a minimum of two and a maximum of four years on the course, receive wallets of home study materials by post and each student is allocated a general tutor. An optional intensive study week is available twice a year at the College. Staff at the College admit that in planning the course they drastically underestimated the time that marking, tutoring and counselling would take. More evidence regarding staff perceptions of tutoring in an unfamiliar distance learning mode is presented later in this report.

The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) Diploma in Educational Technology offered at Jordanhill College was established as a post-experience course for teachers in schools, colleges, and universities, and for librarians and advisers. In the seven years the course has been running, a total of 149 students have registered for the Diploma, for which much of the study is through distance learning. The staff at Jordanhill feel that certain aspects of a comprehensive educational technology course — demonstration, discussion, acquisition of practical skills in equipment handling and materials making — clearly require the environment and facilities of a central institution. Hence, approximately one-third of the study time (175 of a total of 475 study hours) is allocated for home based work, with college attendance at weekends and in vacation periods.

A similar mixture of face-to-face tuition and distance learning is used in the Polymaths course, which has proved popular with serving teachers. The course is open to any adult student, not only teachers. It requires the completion of a five course-book package combining home study with 125 class tutorial hours at a local centre. The package was devised and tested after consultations among mathematics teachers in four Institutes (Lanchester, Brighton, Cheltenham and Manchester) and 20 centres now provide Polymaths tutorials. Over 400 students were enrolled in the scheme in 1980, including technicians, married women returning to work, and managers, as well as teachers.

Another continuing education initiative for teachers which, like the Polymaths scheme, is not directed towards a specific qualification, is the 'mini-courses' in curriculum development at Dundee College of Education. These short in-service courses are conducted almost entirely through distance learning. After an induction session, either at the College or the student's school, course members receive a set of wallets of study materials. These are worked through at the student's own pace at home and their contents are applied to the student's local school situation. Tutorial assistance is given by post, telephone or visit to the local school. Each course is designed to last two to three months and requires a few hours of work each week.

A subject-specific distance learning course, which is used by serving teachers for professional development purposes, although it is not

organised specifically for them, is the Certificate in Field Biology course offered by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of London. This extends over two years including four weeks spent in two short full-time practical courses. Before starting the course the students are invited to London to meet the course directors and discuss the work required for the Certificate. During the home study phase the students work to a prescribed syllabus using a study scheme provided by the University. Assessment is through essays, a practical and written examination, and a field work project. School teachers find this course of direct help in designing syllabuses and planning class and field work in natural history and biology. Since 1978 a third year of study has been available leading to a Diploma in Field Biology. This third year also combines home study with attendance at a full-time two week practical course in August.

Quarrying

The Doncaster Assisted Private Study (DAPS) course in quarrying was first offered in 1971 to adults employed full-time in quarrying. The scheme, run by the Department of Mining and Mineral Resources Engineering at the Doncaster Metropolitan Institute of Higher Education, was devised as a 'rescue operation' for managerial level employees who had not obtained the Associate Membership of the Institute of Quarrying. The Institute of Quarrying's professional examination is an HNC level qualification requiring three years of correspondence study through the DAPS scheme. The students are expected to work eight hours a week on the study materials over a 40 week year and a further 80 hours is spent in face-to-face tutorials each year. Each fortnight students receive a new package of study materials consisting mostly of specially prepared lesson booklets. In each package there is a contents sheet and a comments sheet to allow students to record their impressions of the lesson's presentation and relevance. Course organisers are particularly aware of the seasonal fluctuations in domestic and occupational pressures, and adjust the study timetable accordingly. There is, therefore, a heavier concentration of work in the winter months when the quarrying industry is less active.

Tutorials in the DAPS scheme take the form of four intensive weekend courses each year. These have five objects: to reinforce motivation and sustain study interest; to provide personal counselling about study, domestic and occupational issues; to recap on work already completed; to extend correspondence topics through discussions, visits, films, and lectures; and to give examination practice. For those who are able to join the tutorial for the Friday morning recap session, the weekend offers 20 hours of face-to-face teaching.

A hundred course booklets have been prepared, almost all of which were written by DAPS staff. In this authorship of instructional

materials by DAPS staff lies the crucial difference between directed private study schemes and FlexiStudy. The correspondence units are written to achieve the declared learning objectives printed at the beginning of each unit. These objectives are broad rather than specific and lesson units have appendices which allow for further study by the more able students. The staff member writing the lesson carries out the necessary research and the draft lesson is checked by the course supervisor.

Four members of staff are employed in the DAPS section on the basis of the further education attendance requirement of 30 hours a week. The course supervisor has noted that *"The opportunities for academic staff to devote their time exclusively to the preparation and operation of the course established it on a firm basis in a short space of time"*. The scheme is operated as a self-financing venture: the costs of salaries, capital and consumable items are offset by income derived from the inter-authority recoupment system and course members' fees.

Social and Community Workers

Social service and community work training has usually been thought of as wholly dependant on face-to-face tuition, with a strong element of individual counselling and group work. Because the skills required by such workers are affective (to do with recognising and responding to feelings, with interpersonal communications, and with exploring contrasting perspectives) as much as cognitive, distance learning has not seemed suited to their training. However, there are at least three courses in volunteer and community work training using distance learning methods.

The first, resulting from an association between the YMCA National College in Walthamstow and the North East London Polytechnic, is a Certificate in Youth and Community Work which received its first students in 1982. The following comments are therefore based on draft reports prepared on the feasibility of the course. Through an analysis of the DES *Register of Youth and Community Workers,* through questionnaires and visits to unqualified workers, and through consultative visits to academic institutions, employers' organisations and professional bodies, the course director concluded that there was a strong demand for training and a high degree of uniformity in training needs among many different kinds of workers. Unqualified adult workers were felt to be a valuable but under-developed resource largely because they lacked the conceptual framework to identify and respond to new needs.

A three-year training course is proposed, using a mixture of distance learning, face-to-face tutorials, and residential study periods. The study of the relevant concepts will be done solely through distance

learning; the development of professional skills will be tackled through a combination of distance learning and face-to-face tutorials; and personal development and attitude change will be dealt with in face-to-face tutorials and residential study periods. The students will attend three residential study workshops each year. Although the writing and production of learning materials will incur high initial fixed costs, these will be reduced as the course is adapted to a variety of types of training in the youth service.

The Highlands Region Distance Learning Scheme for Voluntary Workers is one attempt to train community workers through distance learning which is now in operation. A basic course in youth and community work was offered in 1980 comprising seven study units based on four tapes and four slide packs. Tutor-student contact, in addition to the exchange of written assignments occurs through telephone contact, occasional individual or group tutorials, and at a residential weekend. These innovations in training methods resulted from economic necessity and the need to train people working in isolated rural communities. Distance learning techniques were felt to be the only training option available.

Between seventy and eighty adults drawn from youth club work, the Red Cross, youth training scheme supervisors, guidance teachers and church ministers, enrolled in the first year of the youth and community work course. An additional introductory course in youth club work is due to start in 1982 and an advanced course in youth and community work is being planned. The success of this scheme has encouraged playgroups in Rosshire to design their own distance learning package for training playgroup leaders.

The organisers of the Caledonian Certificate in Social Service, as part of the common unit of the CCETSW approved Certificate in Social Service, propose to make use of a number of Open University audio programmes. Students would work in their own homes through broadcasts drawn from selected Open University social science, politics, history, community work, and education courses, all of which have content relevant to the work of the social services. The Leverhulme Trust has funded a study of the use of distance learning techniques for social service training in Scotland.

The first intake of students into the current scheme was in June 1980. They have to undertake a number of recorded learning tasks which are scrutinised by line managers at their workplace and by local study supervisors. Although the Caledonian scheme emphasises college supervision and block release attendance, it is an example of a social service training scheme which uses distance learning to achieve training objectives previously considered exclusive to classroom instruction. The proposed use of Open University audio cassettes as

self-contained instructional modules within the distance learning component of the course is an excellent example of the adaptation of existing educational resources.

Trades Unionists

Workers' education has long been a distinctive feature of adult education. To some, this has meant preparing trade union leaders to perform their representative and negotiating functions. However, for a large group of trade union members, their unions offer an opportunity for gaining occupational advancement through study for professional qualifications by distance learning. One example is the work of the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) which, since 1920, has provided correspondence courses for its members preparing for examinations in local government administration.

NALGO provides a range of courses for approximately 4,000 members at any one time. These are vocationally oriented to help members in their career development. They are offered by NALGO's Education Department, which employs over 30 staff. Drawing on a national panel of approximately 200 tutors, mostly university and college lecturers, the correspondence units are prepared by specialist staff. In recent years NALGO has experimented with combinations of correspondence and face-to-face tuition; to this extent NALGO's work parallels the FlexiStudy provision in the local authority sector.

The aim of the NALGO correspondence courses is *"to provide services particularly suited to isolated students, those of mature years, and those for whom for some reason conventional classes are inconvenient or inappropriate"* .[16] By far the greatest numbers of students are enrolled on correspondence study for qualifying examinations. These courses consist of specially prepared study notes, guided reading, and written and practical assignments. The subject content covers the range of services offered by local authorities: municipal engineering, consumer affairs, health care, chartered secretaries, baths management and so on. Many courses only attract small numbers of students in any one year and consequently would be impossible to run as evening classes. The correspondence course packages are reviewed every three years and revision notes are issued as and when changes in legislation require.

The NALGO correspondence unit is also engaged in a number of linked courses with various colleges across the country. Linked courses follow the FlexiStudy model in that the instructional element is contained chiefly within the correspondence materials provided by NALGO. However, where there are enough students to warrant the introduction of linked courses, the students may attend local colleges for tutorials given by college staff. As with Open University tutorials, the college staff perform a clarificatory, problem-solving function and

are not expected to engage in any substantial lecturing or teaching. Residential weekends or one-week courses are available in some NALGO correspondence courses, but attendance is usually optional and is generally low, largely because of the cost.

Adult Basic Education

Work with adult basic education (ABE) students, rather like that with social and community work trainees, is usually regarded as heavily dependent on individual face-to-face tuition. The national adult literacy campaign in the 1970s recruited volunteer tutors to work with individual adults; the personal relationship which developed between tutors and students was seen as a crucial contribution to the undoubted success of the campaign. An experiment which has challenged this conventional wisdom is a project called Flexible Learning Opportunities in Basic Education, which is sponsored by the Northern Council for Further Education and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU).

Workers in ABE in North East England recognised that, despite the achievements of recent years in basic education provision, there was still a large number of people who might benefit, but for whom little of the current provision was suitable: shift workers, the disabled, mothers with young children, fishermen and agricultural workers were cited as the kinds of people who would be unable to attend regularly for tuition. To assess the feasibility of a flexible learning approach, ALBSU agreed to fund a two-year pilot project in three places in North East England. Each project was to exemplify a separate and distinctive model of flexible ABE provision: the three locations chosen were Newcastle, Blyth and Consett.

The Newcastle project, centred on the Sandyford Adult Education Centre near the city centre, is staffed by three part-time workers, all of whom had previous experience in adult literacy work, and mixes directed private study with on-site tuition. Adults wanting to up-grade or acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills are invited to the Centre where they arrange an individualised learning programme with one of the staff. This consists of three elements: work at home in the student's own time; work on individual learning packages at the Centre but without direct and continual supervision by the staff; and face-to-face tuition from workers at the Centre. The ratio of these elements in each student's learning programme varies according to individual circumstances: some attend the centre only once every six weeks, while some others come two or three times each week. The Newcastle project began with a pilot scheme based on twenty students who had had to drop out of conventional adult literacy classes because of shift work, domestic difficulties or disability.

The Consett project, based in the local Technical College, has a research focus rather than the strong practical orientation of the Newcastle centre. The community surrounding the college has particular problems associated with rural isolation and high unemployment. Hence the Consett project is intended to explore the possibility of providing for those who do not or cannot normally attend classes. The project's full-time worker spends a good deal of time developing contacts with groups and individuals in Consett and its surrounding villages: job centres, community centres, clinics, the hospital, mother and toddler groups. Women's Institute branches and village organisations have all been visited, with a particular concern to develop alternative channels of publicity through these contacts.

The students registered in the Consett scheme spend most of their time working to an individually designed learning programme, which is devised only after consultations between the project worker and the student. In the initial phase tutorials are held once a week if possible. Home visits by the project worker are arranged if students are not able to attend a consultation at the college.

A third example of ABE distance learning has been developed at Blyth in Northumberland, where provision for seagoing and shift workers is based on a local 'drop-in' centre. Leaflets have been distributed in factories, branch libraries, and job centres; local newspaper coverage has helped to publicise the project. Students are offered a choice of areas in which they can work and a checklist outlining different aspects of numeracy and literacy has been devised to show the skills which can be up-graded. As at Consett, home visiting is a feature of the Blyth project, although some students take part entirely through correspondence. Just as Newcastle emphasises practical tuition, and Consett concentrates on community-based publicity, so the Blyth workers are particularly interested in developing a stock of materials for home study and have adapted existing worksheets for self-instruction.

INDIVIDUALISED HOME STUDY

Two schemes which merit particular attention, and which are neither FlexiStudy nor Directed Private Study, are at the Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies and the Malvern Hills College. Both are run as individualised home study schemes in which tutors and students have considerable flexibility in negotiating the learning programme. Unlike FlexiStudy and DPS, students in Harrogate and Malvern do not always follow a previously devised course leading to a recognised qualification or some other evidence of competence. Many of the instructional materials are prepared on site by the tutors and the pace and content of learning are decided by tutor and student. Both colleges are, perhaps significantly, adult education colleges created by local education

authorities in 1973, at the same time as the publication of the *Russell Report,* when they enjoyed a degree of support and operational flexibility unusual in local education authority further and adult education.

OWTLET

The 'Other Ways to Learn — Educational Technology' (OWTLET) scheme at Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies has, since its beginnings in 1979, helped over 600 adults to study in their own homes and at their own pace. The prime movers behind OWTLET are convinced that open learning has positive features which have attracted a new clientele who have had opportunities to attend adult education classes but have not done so.

There is no limitation on subjects offered other than the lack of suitable learning materials or tutors. The College has assembled a bank of learning materials drawn from sources as diverse as the BBC, NALGO, Linguaphone, the Radio Society of Great Britain, the College of Preceptors, Pitmans College, the National Extension College and Wolsey Hall. To date, six correspondence colleges and ten other commercial colleges have contributed to the resource bank. Tutors have also adapted traditional teaching materials or prepared new learning packages for use with OWTLET students. The tutors are not drawn just from the college staff; many work part-time in the OWTLET scheme. They are recognised enthusiasts living and working in the local community who are ready and able to help individual learners develop their skills in their own time and, very often, in their own homes.

The tutor-student relationship is the most important feature of the OWTLET scheme. Once a tutor, with both the expertise required and the skill to transmit it to the student, has been located, both parties negotiate the time, place and content of future studies. Communication between tutor and student can be face-to-face, by telephone, or solely through correspondence, depending on the needs and circumstances of the student. Interestingly the part-time tutors engaged specifically to work with OWTLET students are often more enthusiastic about this teaching mode than the full-time members of staff.

OWTLET is self-financing in that the students pay the full cost of the tutorial service, together with a nominal enrolment fee and a proportion (20 to 25 per cent) of the original cost of the learning materials. The full cost of the materials purchased at the outset of the scheme has now been recovered, but every purchase of new materials necessarily involves an initial financial deficit. The employment of a full-time lecturer in the scheme has created an accounting problem, which in the opinion of the scheme's organisers, is clearly a matter for national negotiation with the appropriate unions.

Tutors are paid the appropriate class teaching rate for each 2½ hours of individual tutoring; this money is collected from the students' fees. Tutors' salary claims are thus matched exactly to students' payments, and tutors are paid after the students have paid their fee. Where tutors can conveniently deal with students in small groups their remuneration is increased to the appropriate class rate for each 1½ hours of tutoring groups of up to five students, and the full hourly rate for groups of six or more; the students' hourly fees are reduced correspondingly.

Recent developments in the scheme have included the support of self-help study groups and the exploration of possible distance learning courses for the police, ambulance and fire services. New subjects and skill areas are added as requests are received from potential students and suitable tutors are found. Psycho-motor skills such as woodcarving, lacemaking, embroidery, and cake decoration are taught through OWTLET, the students working in their own homes on set skills and exercises which are then discussed in tutorials.

A recent Coombe Lodge report declared that *"as far as one is able to judge at this early stage, the scheme has been eminently successful in attracting students and providing the tuition they require, tuition which would, otherwise, not have been available to them"*.[17] College staff acknowledge that the scheme has demonstrated a far wider application of open and distance learning than was originally envisaged, especially for those adults who prefer this mode of study.

Malvern Hills College

Malvern Hills College was established in 1973 as a specialist county centre for adult education in Hereford and Worcestershire. A Home Study Service was set up three years later by the Head of the Community Education Department in response to requests for private study supervision from adult students wanting to prepare for Open University, distance education and various in-service training courses. These were adults whose home circumstances, work commitments or geographical location prevented them from attending classes regularly. The service was offered from 1976 to 1980, in which time about 200 student programmes were arranged.

Initial diagnostic interviews were introduced at an early stage in the development of the Home Study Service. They lasted for an hour or so, when the mutual expectations of tutor and student about the subject matter for study, the desirability of arranging work completion schedules, student progress rates and arrangements for occasional tutorials, were discussed. Tutorials were arranged by appointment, including Saturday mornings.

The work of the Home Study Service was directly complemented by an Educational Advisory Service also established at the college.

Clients coming to the Educational Advisory Service to discuss possible career changes would often undertake a study programme to learn about a new subject. The privacy of home study allowed them to explore a new area of interest without any threat of damaged self-esteem which might accompany their entry into a classroom taught course. The Home Study Service ended in 1980 when the organiser left the College; this again illustrates the vulnerability of marginal operations in adult education.

Women's Institute members

Also in the area of individualised home study are the schemes now offered by a number of voluntary organisations for private learning at home by their members. Most notable among these are the Craft Correspondence Courses offered to members of Women's Institutes by the National Federation. These provide the opportunity to learn a craft for any WI member who is not able to attend regular classes or who prefers to study at home.

The courses are on the whole elementary and practical, and are normally run on a one-to-one basis, i.e. by direct personal contact between the student and the tutor. But group correspondence courses are available, to allow a group of members to meet together to study one of the craft subjects offered. The tutors are WI members who are experts in their craft and who also have teaching experience. Frequently they hold relevant NFWI Home Economics Certificates. They deal directly with their students and send in a composite student report at the end of the course.

Courses normally consist of six detailed lessons, spread over six months. Subjects currently offered at the elementary level include bobbin lace, cane basketry, canvaswork, embroidery, knotting and netting, leather glove-making, patchwork, stitched rugs, toymaking and tie-dye/batik. All students are taught to produce their own designs; and modern design is encouraged, as well as traditional designs. Advanced level courses are offered in embroidery, toymaking and crochet. Other subjects can be covered on demand. Sometimes members wishing to take an advanced level course intend to work towards an NFWI Home Economics Craft Certificate. The course helps them perfect their practical work for assessment. No pressure is put upon students, however, as the courses are primarily designed for the self-fulfilment of the student. Students wishing to go further with their craft are given the necessary information from NFWI and put in touch with their County Home Economics Certificate Organiser.

Certificate candidates working without the benefit of attending a class may apply to NFWI for help with the theory side of their Certificate work. They are put in touch with a WI expert in their craft who gives as much tuition as is required on a correspondence course basis.

All administration is handled by the NFWI Home Economics and Specialised Crafts Department, except where delegated to advisory tutors. Courses are advertised in *NFWI News* and *Home and Country* and full details are supplied on request. Moderate course fees are paid by the students, which broadly cover the direct costs of the service. NFWI pays each tutor her fee at the conclusion of the course. Any problems arising on courses are handled by NFWI. Currently some 80 WI members are taking one or other of these courses.

Chapter Four

DISTANCE LEARNERS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is chiefly concerned with people's perceptions. As with all research into attitudes, perceptions, feelings and emotions, the generalisations and deductions offered must be heavily qualified. However, despite the problems in exploring the affective dimension of human experience, it was felt that this report should go further than simply recording the number and variety of distance learning schemes in the United Kingdom. To have stopped at that would have been to neglect part of distance learning.

Accordingly, the following paragraphs contain data derived from an analysis of reports, surveys and evaluation studies obtained from distance learning staff. The chapter begins with an analysis of the characteristics of students enrolled in FlexiStudy and individualised home study schemes; information on students in directed private study schemes was less complete because it generally recorded only the vocational reasons for studying at a distance, rather than previous educational history, age, sex or other reasons for learning.

The chapter then goes on to consider tutors' and students' perceptions of the process of teaching and learning at a distance, its unique features and its most common problems. The chapter concludes with the report of the findings of a small scale survey, of students in two distance learning schemes, conducted jointly by the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education and the National Extension College. Although the sample was small (69 distance learners), this survey had two advantages: uniformity of research design, so that the information gained from students at the two colleges is directly comparable; the survey questionnaire was administered personally by tutors at the colleges involved, so that ambiguity in the responses was reduced to a minimum.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT DISTANCE LEARNERS

The following generalisations are drawn from analyses of information about student characteristics submitted by twenty-eight separate FlexiStudy schemes. This information was sent in response to a request for in-house progress reports.

There are considerable methodological problems in any comparative analysis of distance learner characteristics. Under the traditional canons of scientific methodology, it can be argued that there are any

number of intervening variables which can cause the students at one centre to be very different from those at other centres. The socio-economic and demographic composition of the catchment area, the nature of FlexiStudy publicity materials, the range of subjects offered, the personal behaviour of tutors, can all affect the kinds of students choosing to register and continue in FlexiStudy programmes.

Despite these problems it was felt important to attempt to outline the characteristics of the students studying at the twenty-eight centres involved. This was a significant research exercise since, as already noted, there is little information available about distance learners, and it is important for future planning that more should be known about the kinds of people who are attracted to various forms of distance learning.

The information about these characteristics is summarised below in four categories; sex, age, occupation, and reasons for studying through distance learning. The data about previous educational history was so scanty as to make any considered comments inappropriate.

The average number of students recorded in the course of one academic year in a FlexiStudy system is 55 and the median number is 42. These figures are not easy to calculate, and therefore should be treated with caution. The sample on which these figures are based was made up of 1,590 students. Obviously the number of students in different schemes partly reflects the different staffing levels. Barnet College, for example, was able to enrol 350 students in the first two years of its operation, whilst other centres assigning only one staff member as a FlexiStudy tutor were able to cope with no more than 20 students.

Sex

Differences between men and women in FlexiStudy participation confirm the broad picture of adult education enrolments drawn in other surveys. The percentage of women students in different schemes varied from 42 to 90 per cent; the median percentage of women in those programmes keeping such records was 71 per cent. Where a breakdown of figures according to sex was available, women constituted 73 per cent of the total number of FlexiStudy enrolments. A likely reason for this high percentage is the prominence of arts and social science subjects in the FlexiStudy curriculum.

Age

Detailed information on the students' ages was only available from seven centres; approximate estimates of student ages (for example *"our students are mostly in their thirties and early forties"*) were not used. The data from the seven centres yielded a total of 361 students,

of which 16 per cent were under 21 years of age and 2 per cent over 65. The modal band of FlexiStudy students was between 21 and 40 years of age: 67 per cent of all FlexiStudy students were in this age band. The remaining 16 per cent were between 41 and 60 years of age. The fact that over two-thirds of the students were in the 21 to 40 age group suggests that their reasons for study were mostly vocational. A more detailed inspection of the figures reveals (where such a breakdown was made available) a significant emphasis on the 21 to 30 age range.

Table 1 Ages of distance learners

Age band	*%*	*No.*
Under 21	16	56
21-40	67	243
41-60	16	56
Over 60	2	6
		Total 361

Occupation

Information about the students' occupations was very limited. Only five centres had attempted any kind of breakdown of FlexiStudy clientele according to occupation. Several others offered impressionistic generalisation such as (occasionally contradictory) declarations that *"personal memory suggests a predominance of students from professional and semi-professional backgrounds, or wives thereof, and of a reasonable educational history"*, or that *"housewives, nurses and shift workers and increasingly the unemployed and single-parent families are all well represented"*.

The number of students from whom occupational information was derived was 161, barely one-tenth of the overall number in the FlexiStudy sample. The chief categories represented in the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Occupations of distance learners

Occupation	*%*	*No.*	
Housewife	24	39	
Clerk/secretary	17	27	
Nurse	15	24	
Full-time student	10	16	
Shift worker	9	15	
Unemployed	3	5	
Retired	3	5	
		Total 131	(out of 161)

Clearly, the available information about the occupations of distance learners is scanty in the extreme. In the present analysis nurses were

over-represented since one of the five centres undertaking a detailed analysis included a disproportionate number of nurses in their student sample. If nurses are regarded as shift workers, this category accounted for almost one-quarter of all the students surveyed; shift workers and housebound mothers represented almost half of the students surveyed in this analysis.

Information about the previous educational history of FlexiStudy students was available for such a small number of students as to make any generalisation, however carefully qualified, invalid. It is surprising that more organisers do not try to discover the previous educational attainments of their students. Given that distance learning can be a particularly difficult mode of study for adults lacking reasonable study skills, it would seem appropriate for organisers to advise educationally inexperienced adults about the possible problems of studying at a distance.

Reasons for Choosing Distance Learning

Suggested reasons why students chose distance learning, in preference to readily available classes, were offered by staff and students in eleven schemes. It should be noted that these 'reasons' are often the organisers' and tutors' perceptions of the students' reasons for studying through correspondence; interviews with the students might have revealed a different picture. Only fifty students were questioned directly about their reasons for undertaking FlexiStudy; in consequence the following comments are impressionistic rather than quantitative.

On the use to which qualifications obtained through distance learning would be put, the largest category of responses emphasised the vocational significance of study. Hence, in answer to the question *"Why are you undertaking a FlexiStudy course?"*, the most common answers were *"to further my career"*, *"to retrain for a new job"* and *"to improve my chances of promotion"*. Twenty-one students mentioned such reasons and only five referred to study for self-fulfilment or interest. As to why FlexiStudy was chosen rather than classroom courses two sets of factors were revealed. First, and most common, were the following extrinsic factors:

- The lack of public transport to and from evening classes.
- Work commitments; some shift workers were only able to study through some form of distance learning.
- Domestic commitments; Family and child care responsibilities, in particular, prevented attendance at evening classes.
- The lack of any available and appropriate evening class; this applied only to a very few students.
- Medical incapacity; unable to attend classes because of psycho-

logical problems or physical handicap; mentioned by only a small number of students.

Second, the factors associated with the uniquely advantageous features of distance learning (as perceived by students). Two factors were emphasised:

- The flexibility of distance learning; allowed students to study at individually convenient times rather than having to adjust their study timetable to the requirements of the academic year; this was mentioned, with approval, by 19 students.
- The self-paced nature of distance learning; mentioned by a much smaller number of students; an interesting aspect of this self-pacing was a preference for 'studying on my own' and wanting to avoid classrooms and schools.

From the information in the preceding paragraphs, the typical adult student in a distance learning scheme is a woman in her late twenties and, if working, employed in a secretarial or clerical capacity or as a shift worker of some kind; if not working she is mostly likely to be a full-time mother. She intends to use her newly obtained qualifications for career advancement, or re-entry to the labour market, and is not able to take evening classes because of her domestic commitments. This highly simplified picture of a FlexiStudy student will confirm many educators' perceptions of the typical clientele in adult education. However, it is important to remember that vocational motives predominate and that students appeared to see distance learning as offering a hitherto unexplored avenue of second chance upward mobility.

Individualised Home Study

The following analysis is based on material from the two individualised home study schemes outlined earlier — at the Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies (OWTLET) and the Malvern Hills College. The information, available on a total of 565 students in the two schemes, provides a reasonable data base for some tentative conclusions about the kinds of adults who are attracted to this form of distance learning.

To recapitulate briefly the differences between individualised home study schemes and FlexiStudy provision, the former (as with most Directed Private Study initiatives) uses instructional materials prepared by staff teaching at the local college; thus the interpretation and clarificatory functions performed by FlexiStudy staff should be less evident. Second, individualised home study schemes offer a predominance of subjects in which students enrol for personal interest and self-fulfilment, rather than for vocational reasons or career advancement.

The most noticeable common characteristic of the students of Harrogate and Malvern were their reasons for studying through

distance learning. In both schemes distance learning was a preferred mode for most students, rather than an expedient alternative to classroom study; most students reported that classroom courses in their subjects were available in their locality. Although both centres are in small towns surrounded by large rural areas, a large majority of the students lived in the towns. The tutor-organiser of the Malvern service has noted that: *"The feature of the service's development which has in many ways been the most unexpected is the extent to which students from urban locations have chosen to follow individually supervised programmes of home study, despite the existence of class based programmes in their locality. Only a small minority of students have lived in villages in the surrounding rural area, most students coming either from Malvern itself or from other towns within the county. Thus, correspondence education should not be conceptualised as a mode of instruction suited only to areas of scattered population: it might be more useful to view it as a method of teaching particularly well suited to certain temperaments, rather than a medium which is employed for geographical reasons".*[18]

The sex and occupation profiles of the FlexiStudy students are paralleled by the students in individualised home study schemes. Women comprise approximately two-thirds of the total student population and one-third of the students are housewives. Very few participants described themselves as unemployed.

ADULTS' EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

The comments in this section, and in the following section on staff perceptions of working within a distance learning mode, are based on an analysis of reports and surveys obtained from eighteen distance learning schemes. These reports were drawn from six FlexiStudy schemes, ten directed private study schemes, and two individualised home study programmes. Two things are immediately noticeable: the paucity of reliable data on students' perceptions of learning at a distance; the lack in local education authority FlexiStudy schemes of any progress surveys or evaluation studies of their students.

This is not, however, a problem unique to distance learning within adult education. In all sectors of the system there is an apparent reluctance to research the processes of adult education and students' experience of participation. This may be partly because adult education staff generally lack the necessary research skills. More likely, it is because adult educators have plenty of other things to do, and systematic research about their students is regarded as potentially useful but logistically impossible.

Examination Success

One objective index of the relative benefits of distance learning compared with classroom instruction is the level of examination

success. Information about pass rates in public examinations was obtained from those institutions which kept records of their students' progress. The general finding was of a high level of success by those prepared through distance learning. The most systematic attempt to use examination success as an objective evaluative criterion is that at the South West London College, which has surveyed the success rates of military service personnel in HNC Business Studies examinations. These personnel were, as explained in chapter 3, prepared for this examination through Directed Private Study. Staff at the College compared the success rate of over 1,370 DPS students with that of students who had taken the day-release or evening class course. The percentages of examination entrants (and it is emphasised that these figures refer to examination entrants only) who obtained a pass were 86 per cent (DPS), 77 per cent (day release) and 50 per cent (evening class). Students who obtained a pass as a percentage of the total course enrolment (including those who did not take the examination) were 50 per cent (day release), 49 per cent (DPS) and 24 per cent (evening class).

Data from three smaller schemes are also available. The Law Society Correspondence Course organisers at Napier College report *"a very high success rate"* among its 38 students and the same College recorded 41 passes out of 67 entrants who had been prepared for part 1 of the Library Association examination by directed private study.[19] Finally, Runnymede Adult Education Centre recorded 17 passes out of a total of 21 entries for GCE examinations in the first year of its FlexiStudy operation.

At this point it is as well to add a cautionary note about the concept of success in distance learning. To a course organiser or tutor, student success may be directly equivalent to passing an examination. Students who leave before the course is finished, or who complete the course but do not take the examination, may be seen as dropouts with the implication that these students have gained little or nothing from the course. To some students, however, the very act of enrolling in a course may mark an important stage in the alteration of their self-image, irrespective of later academic achievements. Some students may also decide that for their purposes enough has been gained from a course by the time a certain number of assignments has been completed. Withdrawing from a course at this stage may signify only that students feel they have derived all possible benefits, rather than that they are unable to cope with its demands.

For educators to realise that their criteria for success may not match those of their students — and that the students' criteria have an innate validity and significance — is one of the hardest attitudinal shifts to make. It is therefore important to affirm that students' perception of

success may not be synonymous with passing an end-of-course examination, and that tutors should not immediately equate drop-out or wastage with failure.

Benefits from Distance Learning

Four aspects of distance learning were identified by students in the 18 schemes concerned as being beneficial and unlikely to be found in classroom courses:

- The flexibility allowed by self-pacing.
- Distance learning in professional and in-service training courses permits students to make direct connections with their own work experience.
- Studying-at-a-distance learning helps the development of transferable study skills — faster reading habits, critical faculties, logical analysis and selective notetaking — quite apart from subject specific skills.
- The accessibility of distance learning for different and educationally inexperienced adults who might be intimidated by participation in classes.

As will be seen later it was the *problems* facing adult distance learners which received the most emphasis in students' and professionals' reports on the experience of distance learning, but the last aspect noted above, the enhanced self-image and development of self-esteem, was one benefit from distance learning which had a particular personal potency. When considering the myriad problems affecting students and staff working in an unfamiliar distance learning mode, it is salutary to remember that distance learning can be personally liberating as well as constraining. A perception of distance learning which was wholly favourable was, however, encountered among staff in four centres. These spoke of the *"tremendous reserve of enthusiasm amongst students"*, the delight of students *"with their discovery of learning for themselves"* and students' high motivation for an *"enjoyable"* mode of learning.

From a staff development perspective three particular features of distance learning were mentioned as beneficial. First, in a Directed Private Study scheme which required staff to prepare self-instructional learning packages for distance learners, it was found that these packages could easily be adapted for other purposes. Hence, DPS material could be used in the classroom as an individualised instruction assignment. Teachers wanting to spend more time working with students in tutorials could ensure that their students completed the lower level learning tasks through self-instruction units; this freed the teachers for more work with individuals and small groups.

Second, the skills identified as necessary to good learning package preparation — the ability to state objectives clearly, to break these

down into achievable learning goals, to arrange a sequential series of progressively complex learning tasks, to communicate clearly — were seen to apply also to the classroom work of DPS staff. The skills of good instructional management were seen as transferable from unit writing to classroom teaching.

Finally, the organiser of one FlexiStudy centre reported how the initial wariness of staff to the introduction of a FlexiStudy component had changed to a recognition that FlexiStudy could serve as a useful recruiting agent for other evening classes. This organiser's policy was to conduct an initial interview with intending FlexiStudy students at which the problems of working in this mode were clearly and firmly stated. As a result some of the potential students had been persuaded to enrol instead in the conventional evening class programme. The Home Study Service at Malvern also recorded how students unused to academic study or unfamiliar with a particular academic discipline had used an individualised home study programme to gauge their reaction to a return to study; a common response had been to enrol subsequently in an evening class at the College. This reinforces the argument that distance learning is often chosen by adults because of the privacy, flexibility and individual emphasis they perceive it to offer. It is not regarded as a second best alternative to be adopted only when other routes are closed, but as a mode with its own particular benefits.

Problems of Distance Learners

As we have seen, information on students' perceptions of their distance learning experience is, to say the least, scanty. Tutors are only too willing to give their verdict on the merits and demerits of administering and teaching in a distance learning mode, but the need for systematic research about student characteristics and students' experience of distance learning, as called for in a recent Advisory Council report,[20] is less well observed. Only four schemes appeared to have attempted to record student reactions to distance learning in their evaluation and assessment progress reports. The tendency was to rely on the staff views of the students' experiences, rather than on the direct testimony of the students themselves. This technique must be suspect and may be inaccurate. The development of policy and provision needs to be based on more than second-hand reports.

Those students who were asked directly to recount the problems they found in distance learning identified nine difficulties:

- The lack of time to complete assignments to their own satisfaction.
- A feeling of loneliness and of an institutionally imposed isolation in their studies.
- A deficiency in the kinds of study skills needed for the successful completion of a distance learning course.

- Problems in integrating study with domestic commitments and consequent family disruptions.
- A lack of self-discipline and an inability to meet work completion deadlines.
- Problems in obtaining books and the inaccessibility of public libraries.
- Tiredness due to studying at the end of a working day.
- Changes of tutors at critical times in the course.
- Lack of criteria of success or of information about their progress.

In the first four problems listed, it is noticeable that only the feelings of loneliness and isolation can be attributed directly to the constraints of studying through distance learning. The other problems were a function of part-time, and not the result of the requirements of studying through distance learning: lack of adequate study time, awareness of incomplete study skills, problems in integrating study with domestic life, are all difficulties commonly reported by adult students engaged in part-time study through evening classes or day-release schemes. Only the problem of obtaining books can be considered in any way unique to distance learning.

ACACE/NEC SURVEY OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

In an attempt to assess the relative validity and reliability of the preceding analysis drawn from the mass of secondary data submitted by distance learning schemes, the Advisory Council, with the assistance of the NEC, undertook a scale survey of distance learners in two colleges, both of which were FlexiStudy centres: Telford College in Edinburgh and Carlett College in the Wirral. Sixty-nine students completed a short questionnaire designed to find out their reasons for studying. The questionnaire, adapted from the version used in the University of Manchester national survey of correspondence students discussed in chapter 2, is shown in Appendix 3.

Student Characteristics

Data was gathered on the students' age, sex, occupation, and previous educational experience. The students were enrolled on a range of courses, the most popular of which were English GCE O-level, preparatory maths, biology O-level, computer studies, and modern studies. The modal age band of students was between 25 and 34 years and 62 per cent of all the students fell into the 35-44 category. As in previous analyses the students were predominantly women (64 per cent). Housewives were the largest occupational category (28 per cent) followed by technical personnel (14 per cent) and those in the professions or arts (14 per cent). Service workers (occupational code 12) and those either retired or unemployed (occupational code 13) each represented 12 per cent of the FlexiStudy students. Clerical or

office staff constituted 10 per cent. It should be noted that nursing staff constituted a noticeable proportion of students in the FlexiStudy population of these two colleges, placing themselves either in the professions or service workers categories (codes 5 or 12). These findings are remarkably similar to the occupational profile of the 161 students in schemes across the country, outlined earlier in this chapter. In both, housewives and shift workers are the predominant groups among FlexiStudy students.

Because nearly all the schemes submitting information for this report did not analyse the educational history of their students, the ACACE/NEC survey sought to find out something about this. Revealingly, the largest proportion of students (26 per cent) reported that they possessed no educational qualifications at all. Fourteen per cent had up to four GCE O-levels to their credit. A total of 46 per cent had either no qualifications, some CSE passes, or up to four O-levels. The other 55 per cent were fairly evenly scattered among a number of categories from those with five or more O-levels to degree holders. The majority (52 per cent) completed their full-time education at 16 years of age; a further 25 per cent left at either 17 or 18. Interestingly, a majority (55 per cent) of these FlexiStudy students reported that this studying at a distance was their first ever contact with formal adult education.

Reasons for Enrolling

The respondents were asked to record their reasons for undertaking a FlexiStudy course, and for choosing FlexiStudy rather than a more conventional adult education day or evening class. They were given a number of possible reasons for studying and asked to tick as many as applied to them. The four most important reasons emerged as:

- To make up for a lack of previous schooling (38 per cent).
- To refresh or improve knowledge (36 per cent).
- To pursue a new subject interest (35 per cent).
- To prepare for a change of job (32 per cent).

Other reasons for studying were:

- To test or improve learning abilities (28 per cent).
- To prepare for a higher education course, other than the Open University (23 per cent).
- To assist in job advancement (20 per cent).

This spread of responses illustrates the absurdity of dividing students' motives into vocational or non-vocational categories. Many respondents recorded that they were studying to improve their abilities or to pursue a new subject interest *as well as* preparing for job change or advancement.

A clearer picture emerges in the students' responses about their

preference for FlexiStudy rather than day or evening classes. They were again invited to tick as many items as applied to them in a list of possible reasons for studying in a distance learning mode. The five most common reasons were:

- Prefer to work at my own pace (49 per cent).
- No classes conveniently available (41 per cent).
- Time available for study varies at different times in the year (36 per cent).
- Domestic difficulties (22 per cent).
- Prefer to study on my own (20 per cent).

Three of these five reasons, including the most important, for choosing distance learning, relate to the intrinsic features of this mode: students prefer to work at their own pace, their time available for study does not fit the conventional academic timetable, and they prefer to study on their own. As has been emphasised elsewhere in this report, distance learning should not therefore be regarded as a second best alternative to classroom study, but as a mode of learning offering its own distinctive and intrinsic benefits.

TUTORS' EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

The skills needed for success by distance learning tutors are not limited to pedagogic competencies. Tutors in the schemes considered in this report drew attention to the differences between classroom teaching and tutoring in distance learning. In particular, they recognised that the demands of distance teaching may be greater than those normally encountered within the classroom. Also, alternating face-to-face teaching with distance teaching is likely to be stressful. All these demands were reflected in four new roles or responsibilities required of distance tutors.

The first was the addition of some kind of counselling or pastoral dimension to their work. Because distance learning was seen to present particular difficulties to students — isolation, lack of motivation and difficulties in obtaining materials — tutors have to be especially aware of the affective elements in student learning. It was not enough simply to restrict tutor-student interaction to instructional encounters or remedial exercises. The tutors had to ensure that, as far as possible, conditions at home or work were such as would enhance and support, rather than hinder, student learning.

The importance of developing strong personal relationships with distance students was the second dimension stressed by tutors. This reflected the general need to adopt a pastoral role mentioned in the previous paragraph. This personal relationship was developed through individual face-to-face tutorials. If this proved impracticable

the tutors had to make their written comments on academic assignments as personal as possible. Instead of marking students' work in what was seen as the accepted manner — an impersonal critique of academic competence and attainment — tutors would use personal examples to illustrate general points, and would seek to be supportive of student attainment wherever possible. Organisers in all three of the distance learning modes surveyed in this report — FlexiStudy, Directed Private Study and Individualised Home Study — reported that personal letters and telephone tutorials were useful channels through which to develop personal relationships. Regular face-to-face tutorials were generally preferable, but alternatives were available. It is particularly interesting that tutors in two schemes claimed that they knew their distance learners better than students in their normal classes.

The third skill required by distance tutors, according to the tutors themselves, was learning how to use tutorials to their greatest educational effect. This is a familiar problem in the Open University, whose part-time tutorial staff have to be discouraged from lecturing in tutorials. Tutors in the present survey saw the functions of tutorials as being to establish in students' minds the first principles of a subject, to identify the problems encountered in home based study, and to develop transferable study skills.

Finally, (and it may be thought somewhat perversely) tutoring in a distance learning mode was seen as needing much more teamwork than was usual for lectures. This was particularly so in Directed Private Study schemes where course planning and course writing were undertaken by a team. Hence, the draft of a new Directed Private Study unit written by one member of staff would be subject to the critical scrutiny of other team members before being rewritten for inclusion in the resource bank of materials used by students. One Directed Private Study report emphasised that tutors should adopt a theatrical style of working because the bulk of their work had been completed, or rehearsed, before they met their students, or audience. Producing learning materials required a different time scale and rhythm of work on the part of course planners and unit writers.

Problems of Teaching at a Distance

The problems seen by tutors as unique to distance teaching were of two types. First, the problems of dealing with students who are not used to distance learning. This unfamiliarity compounds the problems faced by all adults returning to study after some years away from formal education. Second, there are the administrative and operational difficulties experienced by tutors who have to work in what is for them (as much as for the students) an unfamiliar teaching system.

The tutors' perceptions of the difficulties most frequently encountered by their students and their own problems in teaching were:

- Students' need for detailed counselling to minimise the risk of choosing inappropriate courses.
- Maintaining students' interest and motivation.
- Students' reluctance to attend tutorials.
- Students' inability to complete work assignments on time.
- Students' interpretation of written materials.
- Obtaining good quality materials.
- Conduct of tutorials.

Pre-course Counselling

The need for counselling intending students was expressed most strongly by distance learning tutors; they linked the lack of counselling to high levels of student wastage and drop-out. The general consensus was that it was all too easy for students to enrol in distance learning schemes, particularly FlexiStudy courses, without realising the full extent of the nature and level of work involved. As in adult education generally, distance learning course enrolment takes place on an open-entry basis, often with little initial screening of the applicants. The result is likely to be a number of over-optimistic students who see distance learning as somehow less strenuous than evening class attendance. There was felt to be a danger in publicity which painted too rosy a picture of distance learning and the consequent recruitment of adults unequipped for what could be for some a lonely, unfamiliar and frustrating way of learning. Two organisers reported that they now devoted much of their initial interview with intending students to pointing out the problems faced by distance learning students and avoided by evening class attendance; only those who survived this initial interview with their determination to enrol in a distance learning course intact, were admitted.

Maintenance of Students' Motivation

Because adult education is based primarily on voluntary attendance in educational programmes, there is always the likelihood of drop-out. A discontinuance of adult study may not necessarily reflect any dissatisfaction with the course or the tutor, simply an acceptance of more pressing domestic or occupational demands.

In distance learning these pressures are likely to be even stronger. The encouragement of student interest and motivation was seen as particularly important, but, because distance tutors were also often carrying a class teaching load, the time which could be devoted to animating students — through face-to-face and telephone tutorials or personal correspondence — was severely limited. More effective pre-course counselling and screening was seen as part of the answer to this problem, especially if it led to the recruitment of smaller numbers of more highly motivated students.

Students' Reluctance to Attend Tutorials

One experience of the tutors in the present enquiry, which seems to contradict much of the conventional wisdom about distance learning, is the reluctance of students to attend tutorials, even when these are readily available. Tutors reported that students preferred to correspond with them, or to use the telephone, rather than visiting the centre for face-to-face tutorials. It is revealing that this reluctance to attend tutorials should invariably be seen as a *problem* by staff, when students obviously regard it as a positive feature of the system. We should not be surprised that different students, who choose the distance learning route precisely for its perceived privacy and anonymity, choose not to avail themselves of personal tutorials. To tutors used to classroom learning this reluctance is a problem to be resisted; to students it may simply be the normal and preferred way of working.

Students' Inability to Complete Work on Time

The lack of time for study affects many adult distance learners. Not surprisingly, many tutors report the frustrating inability of some students to complete assignments on time. As a FlexiStudy tutorial team leader said of his staff, *"they feel frustrated by the arbitrariness of their contact with these students — waiting for assignments which may never come and planning the occasional meeting for which apologies are sent at the very last moment"*. Another report commented that *"Several tutors have been unhappy at the lack of response from many of their students after enrolment. They have felt obliged to 'chase up' such students which is a tedious and time consuming procedure"*.

This apparent lack of interest is particularly hard for some tutors to understand since the students have probably paid a substantial fee for a course to which they seem to have no real commitment. Once again, more effective pre-course counselling is suggested as some kind of universal panacea.

Students' Misinterpretation of Lesson Units

The FlexiStudy system, in which students work from centrally produced correspondence course texts, can leave considerable scope for the misinterpretation of the instructional materials. In Directed Private Study, where the learning packages are written by the staff who also act as tutors and counsellors, the scope for ambiguity and confusion would seem to be less. In fact, student enquiries about the meaning of correspondence units was recorded as a problem only in one FlexiStudy scheme, whose organiser reported *"a constant stream of minor enquiries about interpretation of certain parts of the material"*.

Obtaining Good Quality Learning Materials

Tutors in two FlexiStudy and one Directed Private Study scheme reported difficulties in obtaining suitable learning materials for use

with their students. In the DFS scheme the tutors were keen to adapt standard text books; faced with the need to produce learning materials in a short time, the only solution was to adapt standard texts in preparation for individualised learning packages. In the FlexiStudy schemes there were considerable reservations about the lack of uniform quality in centrally produced correspondence lesson units. It was felt in some courses that better materials were available, but that no quality control had been exercised in deciding which materials should be bought. Some tutors would have liked to modify NEC texts for use with their students, but felt that this would involve too much work. This would seem to suggest the need for more consultation with course tutors.

Conduct of Tutorials

As seen earlier in this chapter, tutors were certainly aware that tutorial contracts with distance learning students had to be regarded as different in kind from that in conventional classrooms. Tutors in three schemes reported difficulties in adapting; they complained about the lack of atmosphere in tutorials, about the *"very irksome"* job of guidance and counselling, and about the uncertainties of 'correct' tutor behaviour in tutorials.

Administrative and Operational Problems

The problem identified most strongly and most frequently by tutors had nothing to do with new instructional techniques or student learning difficulties: the administration of distance learning schemes was seen as particularly time consuming, needing far more effort than had originally been envisaged. Most distance learning personnel are employed primarily as classroom lecturers (with the exception of a few DPS schemes) and consequently have a teaching load of normal classes as well as their distance teaching duties. In six schemes the tutors felt that they were being allowed inadequate remission from normal teaching duties for the time spent with distance learning students. They saw themselves doing a lot of extra work: pre-course counselling, preparing individual assignments, arranging individual interviews, telephone counselling, arranging and running group tutorials, attending team meetings, completing registers, and updating student progress charts. It was particularly annoying to have spent a considerable time in pre-course counselling and administration, and for the student to decide not to enrol. Organisers of these schemes noted that their staff often spent a great deal of unpaid time dealing with students' problems in an extremely protective way.

Other operational problems were identified by organisers and tutors. Student entry selection was felt to be a procedure which had not been sufficiently considered. Because of limited staff time it was not always possible to interview intending distance learners, despite

the frequently expressed need for more pre-course counselling. Even where tutors were able to see students individually, they were often unable to assess their qualities of perserverance and determination. The hostility of full-time staff towards what was seen as an unproven medium of instruction and an implied threat to the status of the professional lecturer, was recorded in two schemes, both of which relied on a cadre of part-time staff for this administration. The lack of support facilities, such as duplicating services and secretarial assistance, was another problem: one organiser did not have access to an outside telephone line and his tutors were often obliged to use their own home telephones. Finally, attempts to pay staff on the basis of the number of tutorials they had conducted could run into real difficulties when, as previously noted, many students chose not to attend tutorials. Staff could spend a lot of time arranging tutorials and marking work, and then be unable to claim payment because of the non-attendance of students at tutorials.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter considers the future development of distance learning for adults. But, before considering the future, the following summary of the main findings in the preceeding chapters provides some impression of the present scene.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Features of Distance Learning Systems

Distance learning is a generic term covering a range of possible teaching-learning arrangements. Some of the most commonly occurring features of distance learning sytems are:

- Students' study locations are their own homes.
- Institutional resources, human and material, support, rather than form the central feature of, their studies.
- Students spend most of their study time without the presence of a teacher or fellow students.
- Students often work with materials prepared by teachers whom they do not know personally.

Arguments for and against distance learning

The most commonly expressed arguments in favour of distance learning are that:

- It frees students from the academic year timetable.
- It frees students from the need to attend an educational institution on a daily full-time basis.
- It frees students from the need to live close to the providing institution.
- It frees students from an emotional and intellectual dependence on a teacher.
- It frees students from the pressure of fellow students' criticisms.
- It is a cost effective mode of instruction.

Critics of distance learning argue its inherent limitations are that:

- Distance learners miss spoken and non-spoken elements in communication.
- Distance learners lack the stimulus and reinforcement of contact with teachers and other students.
- Distance learning materials restrict student creativity.
- Distance learners lack access to institutional resources.

FlexiStudy
FlexiStudy is a system through which individual students work from materials centrally produced by the National Extension College, supplemented by attendance at local colleges when tutorial help is available. A member of staff at the local college is assigned as the student's personal tutor and marks the student's work. Students buy the NEC correspondence course from the college and enrol as students of the college. FlexiStudy students can attend individual or group tutorials with college staff.

Directed Private Study
Directed private study schemes are based in local colleges where staff write the course materials. Staff also act as tutors and assessors of student progress. Since the students are not working from centrally produced, standardised, instructional packages, the scope for misinterpretation and ambiguity is reduced. There is a wide range of DPS schemes and student clienteles: occupational and student groups currently served include accountants, dock workers, solicitors, librarians, marine engineers and merchant seamen, general practitioners, military personnel, teachers, quarrymen, voluntary and community workers, trades unionists, and adult basic education students.

Individualised Home Study
In individualised home study schemes an individual programme of work is developed for each student after collaboration between learner and tutor. Students rarely follow predetermined courses and staff often prepare new instructional packages for individual students. The degree of individual support and operational flexibility necessary for these schemes is not usually available in local education authorities.

Characteristics of FlexiStudy Learners
Information about adult distance learners is not easily obtainable, but such data as is available about FlexiStudy students shows that:

- Approximately 73 per cent of the students are women perhaps reflecting the predominance of arts and social science subjects.
- The modal age band of students is between 21 and 40, with 67 per cent of all students in this category.
- Almost half of the FlexiStudy students surveyed were housebound mothers or shift workers.

Reasons for Choosing Distance Learning
The two main reasons for students' choice of distance learning rather than classroom courses were:

- A set of extrinsic reasons such as: the lack of public transport to and from classes, problems of attendance because of shift work arrange-

ments, domestic commitments, the lack of an available evening class in the required subject, and medical incapacity.

- A set of intrinsic reasons such as the flexibility and self-paced nature of distance learning.

Students in Individual Home Study schemes preferred distance learning as a mode of study, rather than seeing it as an expedient alternative when appropriate classroom study was not available. Most students reported there were classroom based courses in their preferred subject available locally.

Students' Experience of Distance Learning

- Students prepared for entry to public examinations through distance learning achieve, in general, a high level of success.
- The benefits of distance learning according to students are its flexibility; the direct connection with work experience which can be made by DPS students; the development of transferable study skills (faster reading, exercise of critical judgement, notetaking skills); and its suitability for diffident and educationally inexperienced adults who might be intimidated by classroom participation.
- The few schemes which have investigated students' problems in learning at a distance, revealed the following difficulties: lack of time, feelings of isolation, inadequate study skills, domestic complications, lack of self-discipline, problems in obtaining materials, tiredness, changes of tutors, and lack of information from tutors about students' progress.

Tutors' Experience of Distance Learning

- Three particular features of distance learning were mentioned as beneficial by distance teachers. First, DPS tutors found that distance learning materials could be used as self-instruction packages in classroom work. Second, the skills needed to prepare distance learning instructional materials (the ability to state objectives, to break down objectives into achievable complex learning tasks, to communicate clearly) were transferable to classroom teaching. Thirdly, the availability of FlexiStudy courses could serve as a useful recruiting agent for day and evening classes.
- Four new roles and responsibilities were identified as necessary to good distance teaching. Tutors had to add a counselling component to their work, they had to develop a strong personal relationship with students, they had to learn how to use tutorials to the best educational effect, and they had to be prepared to work as a team.

Problems of Teaching at a Distance

The problems most commonly identified by tutors were:

- Students' choice of inappropriate courses.

- Students' declining motivation and interest.
- Students' reluctance to attend tutorials.
- Students' inability to complete assignments on time.
- Students' misinterpretation of learning materials.

Staff also reported problems in obtaining good quality teaching materials and in developing the skills and confidence needed to conduct effective tutorials.

Administrative and Operational Problems

These problems, generally reported as far more pressing and significant than those of developing appropriate teaching skills, were identified as:

- Time consuming administrative work.
- Inadequate remission allowed from normal teaching and administrative duties.
- Need to undertake a wide range of extra work: pre-course counselling, preparing assignments, marking, arranging and conducting individual tutorials and group sessions, telephone counselling, attending team meetings, completing registers, and updating student progress reports.
- Selection of students.
- Hostility of staff towards an unfamiliar mode of teaching and learning.
- Lack of access to support facilities.
- Difficulty in assessing appropriate rates of payments for staff.

NEW PATTERNS OF LEARNING

The Advisory Council's report on *Continuing Education: from Policies to Practice* asserted in connection with distance learning that *"many adult students have a very high regard for this mode of learning".*[21] The present report has confirmed this, as students have repeatedly declared that distance learning was *not* for them a second best alternative to classroom instruction. Rather, distance learning was seen as having unique advantages which made it particularly appropriate for large numbers of adult students who would otherwise be unable to enrol in formal courses of study.

There are, however, a number of constraints on the present operation and future development of distance learning systems; chief among these are the lack of specific resources, the difficulty of creating the necessary administrative support, the lack of regional support to those wishing to establish new systems, and the relative absence of training for staff new to this field. In order that all adults who want to study at a distance have the opportunity to do so, the Advisory Council concludes that:

Funding
Private and public institutions must be encouraged to allocate adequate funds for the development of effective distance learning systems. It is recognised that the initial costs of this mode of teaching and learning are necessarily high, but these investment costs can be recouped over time.

Organised collaboration
An organisational framework should be established to promote collaborative ventures among local, regional, and national institutions. A network of centres for independent learning could be the focus for this.

Monitoring of standards
Action is needed to ensure the effective monitoring of standards and the availability of good instructional materials. HM Inspectorate should play a part in this.

Research
There needs to be more systematic research into distance learning systems and their clientele. The schemes surveyed in this report have mostly developed in a rather haphazard way. Services engaged in broadly similar functions have not apparently been able to learn from the experience of others about, for example, efficient administrative procedures and student characteristics. If the investment of staff time and resources in developing distance learning systems is to be effective, more needs to be known about:

- The kinds of students who choose to learn at a distance rather than through conventional classroom provision.
- The experience of learning at a distance — its advantages and the problems it raises for students.
- The kind of pre-course and continuing counselling which is best suited to minimising these problems.
- The skills needed by tutors in distance teaching (face-to-face tutorials, individual interviews, telephone counselling, and the marking of students' work).
- The most effective ways to prepare instructional materials for use in a distance learning system.
- The most effective ways of tackling the administrative and operational problems encountered by organisers and tutors in distance learning systems.
- The courses and curricula best suited to distance learning.

Administrative Changes

The most frequently expressed view by staff, and the view repeated with the greatest vigour, was about the administrative changes which would increase the effectiveness of distance learning systems. The Advisory Council has already made the point that the introduction of distance learning systems *"will require an operational flexibility that is at present lacking"* and *"substantial changes in working practices in the public education sector"*, because distance learning *"calls into question for example, the basis of many staffing practices, and it will require radical redefinitions of some teaching jobs. It also questions many of the current methods of allocating resources and staff to institutions on the basis of student hours and course levels. In particular it will require co-operation among many local and national bodies of a kind little in evidence at present"*[22]

The resources for a considerable extension of locally administered distance learning systems already exist. There is a cadre of staff with some experience of tutoring at a distance, and even of writing distance teaching materials. There are also many excellent teaching materials which can be easily adapted for distance learning. To harness these resources for an expansion of distance learning provision, it is not necessary to create new structures: adjustments in administration procedures and conditions of service could substantially increase the number and range of distance learning opportunities for adults. The following specific initiatives would greatly contribute to that development:

- Clear directives from the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office to local education authorities about extending open access distance learning provision through locally appropriate schemes. The requirement in Japan where senior high schools provide distance learning courses for all who wish to take them, might usefully be studied.
- Adequate remission time from other teaching and administrative duties for those working with distance learners. Agreed national arrangements for remission should be sought.
- Support facilities in institutions for distance teachers. This should include adequate secretarial help, telephone usage, and reprographic facilities.
- No distinction between fees charged for classroom courses and distance learning courses. Distance students should not be penalised by higher fees.

Independent Learning

There is substantial research evidence in Britain,[23] the United States[24] and Canada[25] to show that many adults undertake deliberate and purposeful learning projects outside formal educational

courses. This self-directed and self-planned learning can be seen as the submerged part of the adult learning iceberg[26] — that part which proceeds without help from professional educators. But this research also shows that these independent adult learners frequently acknowledge that they would have liked some help in planning their learning and more access to existing educational resources. Collaboration between distance learning staff and independent adult learners could provide educational benefits far beyond the very modest resources which would be called on.

Independent Learning Centres

The establishment of centres for independent learning is essential to any attempt to promote collaboration between independent learners (working individually or in groups) and providers of distance learning. Centres of this kind have already been recommended by the Advisory Council.[27] A recent example is the Manchester College of Adult Education which has opened its facilities to independent learners, who for a fee of £1,00 per term, can use the library, music practice rooms, catering facilities, and seek advice and help on their studies. Such centres, placed in colleges and libraries, would contain a range of self-instructional and distance learning materials, as well as specialist staff to advise learners on appropriate learning packages and to help other staff in developing distance learning schemes. A centre for independent learning in a major institution in each area could form the basis of a national open learning network.

Public Libraries

Most public libraries are visited by more people, more frequently, than most adult education centres. The Russell Report urged greater co-operation between adult education centres and local libraries, suggesting that libraries should build up their advisory functions.[28]

The experimental Adult Independent Learning Project, sited in nine large public libraries in the United States, explored the ways in which libraries could support independent learning. Librarians were successfully trained to help independent learners set their goals and plan their learning projects. The success of this experiment suggests that one member of staff in at least every large public library should be made responsible for helping enquirers learn how to choose suitable texts and manage their learning. This learning advisor would be familiar with the range of distance learning opportunities and materials available from correspondence colleges and local adult education centres operating FlexiStudy, Individualised Home Study, and Directed Private Study schemes, so that when appropriate, independent learners could be advised about schemes and instructional packages.

Study Discussion Groups

As the Advisory Council has noted *"Self-help study groups are already well established in this country in, for example, the adult education work of Women's Institutes and the Pre-School Playgroups Association".*[29] The National Housewives Register also sponsors living-room learning groups which meet regularly for discussion of matters of social concern.

The educational benefits of self-help study groups are considerably increased when all the members have access to materials which can be studied before the discussion sessions. The Malvern Hills College provides one example of a local home study service supplying self-instructional learning packages to leaderless, informal, women's study circles meeting in their own homes in rural villages; these groups do not want a tutor to organise a course for them, they merely seek access to study packages to inform their discussions.[30] Any extension of this kind of collaboration between distance learning providers and informal study discussion groups is to be welcomed.

Training Distance Teachers

The problems met by staff new to distance learning systems and their awareness that such work called for new skills have already been examined: the need for student counselling, strong personal relationships with students, effective tutorials in a distance learning setting, and working as part of a team. This indicates a clear need for staff training both before and during the setting up of a distance learning scheme.

This training need not follow the normal academic timetable. A series of one-day workshops, involving role playing and simulations, to provide practice in marking and course writing exercises, should be sufficient. Training should not be regarded as an optional extra to be fitted in as and when possible. Adequate remission of normal teaching and administrative duties to enable attendance at training workshops would indicate a serious intention to provide high quality distance teaching.

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APPENDICES

1 Bibliography of Open University research on distance learners
2 Contributors to the report.
3 ACACE/NEC FlexiStudy student profile questionnaire.
4 Advisory Council and Committee membership.

APPENDIX ONE

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OPEN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ON DISTANCE LEARNERS

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APPENDIX THREE

ACACE/NEC FLEXISTUDY STUDENT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

1 Which FlexiStudy course(s) are you currently enrolled for?

2 Age. Tick the box that corresponds to your age group.

under
16 ☐

16-19 ☐
20-24 ☐
25-34 ☐
35-44 ☐
45-54 ☐
55-64 ☐
65+ ☐

3 Sex. Enter M or F in box. ☐

4 Using the list of occupation codes provided, enter in the box the most appropriate code for your present employment. In the other box please describe your occupation and industry or other field in which you work. There is a code for those not currently working.

Code ☐ Job and industry ☐

5 Using the enclosed list of 'education codes', enter in the box below the code that best describes your highest educational qualification.

Code ☐

6 How old were you (to the nearest whole year) when you completed your full-time education? (This can include a course of full-time study which involves part of the time in employment.)

Age ☐ Not yet finished ☐

7 (a) Which FlexiStudy college are you enrolled at?

(b) How far is this from your home?
3 miles or under ☐ 3 to 10 miles ☐ over 10 miles ☐

8 What made you decide to enrol for your FlexiStudy course(s)? Tick as many reasons as apply to you.

Preparation for OU	☐
Refresh/improve subject knowledge	☐
Interest in a new subject area	☐
Test/improve learning abilities	☐
Advancement in a job	☐
Make up for a previous lack of schooling	☐
Prepare for a higher education course (other than OU)	☐
Other	☐

9 Have you taken any other part-time adult education classes prior to studying through FlexiStudy? (Yes/No)

10 Is there any particular reason why you have chosen to study by FlexiStudy, instead of attending an adult education class? Tick as many reasons as apply to you.

Previously studied by correspondence and found it helpful	☐
Prefer to work at my own pace	☐
No classes conveniently available	☐
Time available for study varies at different times of the year	☐
Shift worker	☐
Disabled	☐
Prefer studying on my own to studying with other people in a class	☐
In an institution	☐
One parent family	☐
Other domestic problems	☐

Codes

Occupation codes
Please code your occupation from the groups below when answering question 4.

01 Housewives
02 Armed forces
03 Administrators and managers
04 Teachers and lecturers
05 The professions and the arts
06 Qualified scientists and engineers
07 Technical personnel: including data processing, draughtsmen and technicians
08 Electrical, electronic, metal and machines, engineering and allied trades
09 Farming, mining, construction and other manufacturing
10 Communications, and transport: air, sea, road, and rail
11 Clerical and office staff
12 Shopkeepers, sales, services, sport and recreation workers. Fire brigade and police
13 Retired, independent means, not working (including unemployed, but not housewives), students
14 In institutions, e.g. prison, chronic sick, etc.

Education codes
Please examine this list and answer question 5 with the appropriate code for the highest level of qualification that you hold.

A No formal educational qualifications
B CSE, RSA or school leaving certificate in 1 or more subjects
C GCE O level, SCE O grade, school certificate or equivalent in 1-4 subjects
D GCE O level, SCE O grade, school certificate or equivalent in 5 or more subjects
E GCE A level, SCE H grade, higher school certificate or equivalent in 1 subject
F GCE A level, SCE H grade, higher school certificate or equivalent in 2 or more subjects
G ONC or OND
H HNC or HND
J Teachers certificate or equivalent
K University diploma or equivalent based on at least one year's full-time study
L University first degree
M Higher than first degree

APPENDIX FOUR

ADVISORY COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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